

A223 Early modern Europe



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Book 3

States, commerce and ideas

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Chapter 17 Broader horizons

Amanda Goodrich

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Learning outcomes

By the end of this chapter you should be able to:

- recognise the forms of government and state that existed in early modern Europe
- demonstrate knowledge of European expansion in terms of trade and colonisation
- show understanding of both domestic and overseas travel and how this affected the identity of people in the early modern period.

Introduction

During this module your studies have shifted in perspective with each new book, moving from individuals and families in Book 1 to larger local groups and communities in Book 2. In Book 3, *States, Commerce and Ideas*, you will be zooming out further and looking at states and nations in early modern Europe and at ideas and activities that crossed the continent. You will explore state structures and systems and how state-building became an important aim of powerful rulers, and also how the changes in Christian allegiances as a result of the Reformation led to large-scale religious conflict – although some communities learned to coexist.

As you learned in the previous books, production of more goods, including ones that were new, was a feature of the early modern period: in this book you will explore the emergence of a ‘consumer society’ in the eighteenth century. Commerce and overseas trade also increased, with many European countries developing significant trading posts and colonies in North and South America, and the Far East. Such commerce was aided by new financial systems, such as banks and stock markets and the availability of credit. Indeed, historians have identified both consumer and financial revolutions in the later part of our period. By the eighteenth century Europeans were travelling more than ever before, both within and beyond Europe, in pursuit of new materials and new markets for exploration, education and pleasure. Such increased travel brought a greater interaction between people of different cultures, and with it a greater consciousness of regional and emerging national identities. The later part of our period was also significant for the flow of new knowledge and ideas among the people of Europe, such as those of the ‘Scientific Revolution’ of the seventeenth century and the Enlightenment in the eighteenth century. Revolution is a concept much discussed in relation to changes in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and after reading this introduction you should listen to the ‘Revolution’ audio in the ‘Early modern world in objects’ section of the module website.

In this chapter I will introduce you to the structures of states within geographical boundaries as depicted on the interactive map, and the juxtaposition of political theories with practice in a study of

absolutism. You will also explore some aspects of travel, local to global, and travelogues that relayed such travel experiences. You will again pick up the theme of identities from the chapter ‘Living together’ (Chapter 9) in Book 2, but in a new context of developing national identities.

17.1 Europe: boundaries, states and authority

I would like you now to think about what ‘Europe’ might mean geographically towards the end of our period. To briefly recap on what you learned about this in the chapter ‘Early modern Europe: an introduction’ (Chapter 1) in Book 1 regarding geographical boundaries, the term ‘Europe’ was first used by ancient Greek thinkers and defined ‘their side of the Mediterranean’ from the other side (Wiesner-Hanks, 2006, p. 2). By 1500 Europe was more closely associated with the Roman Catholic (as opposed to the Eastern Orthodox) Church and Latin-based cultures, with the **Ottoman Empire** placed firmly outside its boundaries. The exact territorial boundaries of Europe remained ill-defined and frequently changed. For most ordinary early modern people, however, their vision of space and place tended to be much more localised and ‘Europe’ was a somewhat hazy concept that they would rarely come across. Indeed, as Henry Kamen puts it, “‘Europe’ remained a nebulous idea, seldom encountered even in print’ (Kamen, 2000, p. 1). As you will see later, it would not form a part of a person’s identity in the way that it might for Europeans today. The following passage from Kamen describes the difficulties of creating boundaries:

The notion of ‘Europe’ remained little more than a perceived ideal ... In the real world, however, there were frontiers, to which map-makers tended to give a visible reality but which were difficult to define. In administrative terms, a frontier was not territorial but described rather the limits of a jurisdiction (noble, ecclesiastical, urban). Even then, the overlapping of different types of jurisdiction made it impossible to arrive at geographic precision in peace treaties, and frontiers did not necessarily mean that there were any firm differences of politics and culture between independent political units. The simplest frontiers (and always the most desired, for commercial reasons) were represented by water. The division of land was frequently determined by the division of waters: nations tried to define their frontiers according to the seas and rivers that fed them. Communities fought for the right to include streams (precious for both food and irrigation) within their domains. States fighting to establish their identity made every effort to obtain a sea-coast or

at least a seaport: seventeenth-century Muscovy successfully ceased to be a landlocked country and obtained an extensive coastline, whereas a poorer region like Aragon failed to break through to the sea, remaining as the only landlocked kingdom in Spain.

(Kamen, 2000, pp. 5–6)

Online session 17.1

Now go to the module website and complete online session 17.1. This should take around an hour and 15 minutes.

As you will have gleaned from online session 17.1, during the early modern period central governments of European states were predominantly empires or kingdoms, ruled by emperors or monarchs. Such rulers invariably held great power, including the authority to enter into and end wars, to make laws and to impose taxes, all of which had a considerable impact on the lives of ordinary people. There was a close, but not always peaceful, relationship between church and state, or between ‘throne and altar’. Power struggles broke out between the church and monarchs, and also between monarchs and the powerful nobility. As you will learn in the chapter ‘States and people: the growth of governance in early modern Europe’ (Chapter 18), state-building was a long-term process and ideas about monarchy and the power it invoked had been developing since the Middle Ages. Increasingly, early modern European monarchs claimed that under law, both religious and secular, they had the divine right to rule, and such ‘absolutist’ rule became particularly ubiquitous in Europe from 1660 until the French Revolution in 1789.

Despite the fact that some ordinary people expressed strong political views, as you saw in the chapter ‘Popular action: ritual, protest and riot’ (Chapter 16) in Book 2, the majority of the European population had no political rights. In many countries there was no representative central government; and where there were central or local assemblies of one kind or another, the representatives were generally drawn from the nobility or merchant elite. Indeed, the concept of democracy as a legitimate form of representative government, as recognised today, was

not realised within the early modern period. The universal right to vote for representatives in government was not established in Europe until the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

As well as monarchs, early modern people were subject to other forms of authority.

Exercise 17.1

Think back over Books 1 and 2 and what you have learned from the interactive map in online session 17.1. Make a quick list of the different ways you might think about the topic of authority and where it lay in the state, families, local communities and so on.

This should take around 20 minutes.

Discussion

My list may not be the same as yours and you may have come up with more or different examples, but here are some suggestions:

- Authority generally lay with those higher up the social hierarchy: monarchs, noblemen, higher clergy. Judges, military leaders and city financiers often came from the families of the nobility.
- As you learned from the interactive map, most rulers were powerful monarchs but some states incorporated layers of authority. The Holy Roman Empire officially had the Pope at its pinnacle, followed by the Habsburg monarchy, and then by rulers of individual smaller states. Britain had a limited monarchy, with the king and Parliament jostling for power in the hierarchy of government.
- In the family, the father was the traditional head and held authority over his wife, children and any servants. Women held sway over children and servants, but not their husbands.
- In the local community, authority was held by landowners, magistrates or the equivalent, priests, members of local authorities, assemblies or councils. Power tended to be concomitant with property ownership and wealth.
- Much power was associated with landholding, and generally the greatest landowners had the most power throughout Europe. The nobility often had very large landed estates, but it was in countries such as Britain where primogeniture was practised (meaning the entire estate was inherited by the eldest son) that often the greatest concentration of such landed power, and thus authority over the surrounding population, existed.

- In larger towns and cities, wealthy merchants, professionals, business owners and others formed the middling sort. This social rank grew in size and gained greater authority during the early modern period. Hierarchies existed within professions such as the provision of healthcare, with physicians claiming authority and control over the many other healers who in fact provided much of the care.
 - In the workplace, masters held authority over apprentices, employees working for wages and servants.
 - Those below the middling sort – the labouring sort and the poor – had the least authority in society as a whole, although even poor men held authority in the family.
-

But, as you learned in Book 2, social hierarchies and structures are quite complex. Although the social structure was clearly hierarchical, with everyone (in theory at least) knowing their place, early modern societies did not merely reflect a ‘top-down’ hierarchy with the elite in complete control. The middling sort was growing in most areas of Europe and ordinary people, including women, had important roles to play in the local community and the workplace. In Chapter 18 you will learn more about central and local government from both ‘top-down’ and ‘bottom-up’ perspectives. Challenges to authority could be made in a number of ways (as you saw in Chapter 16). The acquiescence of those lower down the social order was always important and necessary to the elite and to the smooth functioning of society.

17.2 Absolutism in theory and practice

The theory of absolutism was based on the idea that monarchical authority came directly from God, was sacred and placed power in the monarch's hands absolutely, unlimited by laws. The French theorist Jean Bodin (1530–1596), in *The Six Books of the Republic*, published in 1576, compared the state of monarchy to a household where the father had complete authority over all others in the family. He argued that the king was answerable only to God: the king's subjects had no right to question the actions of the monarch or any right of resistance; they must obey the authority of the king as a Christian duty (Wiesner-Hanks, 2008 [2006], pp. 126–7). Theories of absolutism, much promoted in France by Louis XIV (1638–1715, reigned 1643–1715) in particular, became popular with other European monarchs, such as Frederick the Great of Prussia (1712–1786, reigned 1740–86), the Stuarts in Britain and the Habsburg monarchs, as well as among rulers of smaller states such as Württemberg and Denmark.

Exercise 17.2

Turn to Reading 17.1, 'Danske Lov' (1683), an extract from the Danish law code, located at the end of the chapter.

Thomas Munck, who translated this extract, explains that the Danish law code it comes from was promulgated in Denmark in 1683. It was 'a summary of many of the essential points already made in the (still unpublished) Royal Law of 1665 written by the King's secretary and librarian, Peter Schumacher [1635–1699]', and it was 'derived from contemporary theory of unlimited monarchy and natural law' (Munck, 2005, pp. 364–5).

Consider the following questions and write a short analysis including, where necessary, quotations from Reading 17.1 that support your discussion:

- What can you glean as to the provenance of the extract? What was the intended audience?
- What does the extract tell us about absolutism?
- Overall, how useful is this source to the historian?

This should take around 30 minutes.

Discussion

- Did you remember the sort of issues you need to consider when asked for the 'provenance' of a source? For example, who wrote it, what sort of source is it, and how reliable is it? This extract is taken from a primary source, but it is a modern translation. The original was a public document intended for publication as a summary of new law and it was based on contemporary printed political theories. This source was written by Schumacher, whose position in the king's service suggests he was a man of education and political knowledge. Schumacher wrote this text as a servant of the king and so he was fulfilling the king's wishes. We cannot be sure what his own views of government might have been.
- This extract tells us that the king has supreme power and authority over everyone, including all the nobility and clergy. Note that the people are called 'subjects' here and they must all, whatever their rank, be 'obedient, humble and faithful to the King, their protector'. There are severe penalties for those who oppose the king or challenge his absolutism. The people, then, have no political rights whatever. The king, on the other hand, has 'absolute hereditary rights'. Did you remember to use brief quotes from the extract to illustrate the points you were making? That would be an important part of a text analysis answer in the exam.
- I would argue that this is a clear and concise source and, although a translation, it is highly valuable to the historian as an example of an official state document expounding a theory of absolutism

Moving now from Denmark to Britain, you will see in Exercise 17.3 how ideas of absolutism were interpreted by the Stuart King James VI of Scotland/James I of England (1566–1625, reigned Scotland 1567–1625 and reigned England 1603–25). James I had to rule with Parliament and so could not act entirely alone. That did not, however, stop him or other Stuart kings from promoting concepts of divine right and absolutism.

Exercise 17.3

Turn to Reading 17.2, 'Extract from *The True Law of Free Monarchies* (1598)' and Reading 17.3, 'Extract from a speech before the English Parliament in March 1610', located at the end of the chapter. Reading 17.2 is taken from a book ostensibly anonymously published by James I. He was a scholar, but we do not know for sure that he actually wrote the book, or all of it. Reading 17.3 is an extract from a speech to Parliament, although at this time there was no publication of parliamentary debates; that only came in the eighteenth century with Hansard.

Consider the following questions and write a short analysis including, where necessary, quotations from the readings that support your discussion:

- What can you glean as to the provenance of the extracts in the readings?
- What do they tell us about the king's views on, and experience of, absolutism?
- How do these extracts compare with the Danish source (Reading 17.1) you studied in exercise 17.2?

This should take around 30 minutes.

Discussion

- The first thing to note about these extracts is that they are taken from the originals and reproduced in an edited volume of primary sources. The original spelling has been modernised and the content abridged. The source for Reading 17.2, ostensibly written by the king, is a published work intended to make public his views on absolutism. The source for Reading 17.3 is a speech made to Parliament. Both sources are valuable to the historian as examples of the king's views on absolutism.
- In the first extract James I is asserting his legislative powers over those of Parliament. He claims that he has the right to make laws without Parliament, but it cannot do so without his approval. Parliament is only the king's court. The second extract makes strong claims as to the divine elements of absolutism, stating that monarchs are identified by God as gods. The king argues that he is above the law and rules over Parliament because he is 'the supremest thing upon earth'. But you can see that he is battling with Parliament, which he knows will dispute such lofty claims. He warns Parliament not to push him too far and 'meddle with such ancient rights of mine',

but there is some sense of pleading here. He is clearly embedding his rights in an ancient past to try to give them credence.

- In terms of comparison, Denmark's statement of absolutist doctrine provides a concise definition, basing its argument in law, with the king being the supreme authority in government and over all his subjects. There is no suggestion of opposition or any curbs on his power. In Readings 17.2 and 17.3 the claims to divinity are greater, with the suggestion that monarchs are gods. Yet although James I develops a strong theory of absolutism the extracts suggest that he knew that Parliament was not convinced that he held such power and would not always allow him to assert it.

Think back to the Bill of Rights 1689 that you read when studying the interactive map in online session 17.1 and consider how far it limited the power of the English monarchy. You perhaps see it in a different light now that you have read about the sort of ambitions to supremacy which the Stuart kings tended to harbour. The restrictions on the incoming William III (1650–1702, reigned 1689–1702) seem quite stringent. (You will be studying the Bill of Rights more fully in Chapter 18.)

With such theories of absolutism promoted around Europe it is perhaps not surprising that historians in the past, particularly in the nineteenth century, proclaimed the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries an 'Age of Absolutism'. This label was developed with hindsight and was based on the sort of absolutist theories you have just studied. Yet, more recently, this view has been challenged by historians who have argued that while absolutism was popular with monarchs, they often found it difficult to fully impose on the ground. In other words, the theory of absolutism was not fully borne out by practice.

Rulers such as Louis XIV, perhaps the ultimate absolute monarch, attempted to impose absolute rule by controlling the powerful nobility, centralising the state and taking control of all its major activities, such as military campaigns, raising finances and taxation. Munck notes that they attempted to intimidate and distance themselves from their subjects by elaborate and extravagant ceremony and that Louis XIV in his *Reflections on Kingship*, written in 1679, stated the importance of royal ceremony as a means of emphasising his supreme power and invoking appropriate deference from the people. Indeed, Louis XIV was the master of such grand show and display, and French absolutism

was promoted through culture, pageantry and architecture at the lavish palace of Versailles, which became a ‘purpose-made display cabinet’ for absolute monarchy (Munck, 2005, p. 366). He also cultivated his own public persona and adopted the sun as his emblem, promoting his image as the ‘Sun King’ – as Figure 17.1 illustrates. But Munck concludes that in reality even the monarchy of Louis XIV ‘was a well-judged compromise between strong and active central government with supervisory powers on the one hand, and, on the other, concession to the elite on a sufficient scale to ensure co-operation, or at least acceptance’ (Munck, 2005, pp. 365–8).

Merry Wiesner-Hanks has argued that some so-called enlightened absolutist monarchs, who were influenced by Enlightenment ideas, also attempted to extend their control over new areas of government such as education, welfare and communications. Maria Theresa (1717–1780, the only female head of the Habsburg dynasty, Holy Roman Empress and queen of Hungary and Bohemia, reigned 1740–80) did achieve some success in centralising government and in reforming agricultural systems, welfare and education. But although she imposed edicts on her people, there was no guarantee that they would all abide by them. For example, in 1774 Maria Theresa ordered that grammar schools be created in every parish, but in Hungary they were not popular and parents refused to enrol their children. When the state capital was a great distance from the outlying parts of the country and travel and communications were slow, there was little rulers could do to enforce their new edicts (Wiesner-Hanks, 2008 [2006], pp. 285–90). Wiesner-Hanks concludes that the absolutist ‘aims of European rulers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries far exceeded what they could actually do’ (Wiesner-Hanks, 2008 [2006], p. 290).

Moreover, as Kamen has pointed out, it seems that all rulers, not just monarchs, were claiming absolute sovereignty, from noblemen over their extensive lands in Spain and Poland and in small states such as Württemberg, to petty princes, and even to state assemblies. With the multi-layered and often unclear hierarchy of authority in entities such as the Holy Roman Empire, confusion and conflicts often ensued. In Germany, for example, one contemporary theorist claimed that the emperor was an absolute monarch, while another claimed absolute power for each state within the empire and for the Imperial Diet (the assembly of all the estates in the empire) as a whole. Thus absolutism was difficult to apply in the crowded states of Europe, and European

rulers could rarely act without consulting the local elites, the church and local bodies of authority (Kamen, 2000, pp. 240–5).



Figure 17.1 Henry Gissey, costume design for King Louis XIV of France, 'Sun King' from the ballet *La Nuit*, 1653, pen, wash and gouache, 17 x 26 cm. Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, France. Photo: Bridgeman Images.

So, I would conclude that absolutism was an important political theory in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europe, and popular with kings, princes and other rulers, but it never fully functioned in practice. That does not mean that monarchs did not try their best to make it work

and, as you have seen, many adopted it. Ultimately, though, the theory was thwarted by the fact that no ruler could rule alone. Should absolutism, then, be banished to the dustbin of history as a misplaced ideological remnant of an *ancien regime* (old regime) Europe? Let's not be too hasty here, for absolutism was not, after all, a complete failure. Many of the impetuses of absolutist rulers were, as you have seen, modernising; they involved the creation of a broader centralised state, a strong military and, for those more enlightened absolutist leaders, a new focus on issues such as education. Links between absolutism and Enlightenment thought also gave it a modernising agenda in part, as you will see in the chapter 'Ideas and the Enlightenment' (Chapter 23). Another point to take away from this discussion is that absolutism was a political idea or theory, and you might consider associating it with the module theme of ideas.

17.3 Travel and overseas expansion

Throughout the early modern period people travelled beyond Europe to discover and explore unknown territories, to acquire natural resources, new products and markets, and for military conquest and conflict. European countries were also beginning to develop overseas empires as a result of broader exploration and overseas trade. As Figure 17.2 illustrates, India and the east became increasingly important for trade and imports such as spices, fabrics, pottery and more. During the latter part of the period more people travelled around and beyond Europe than ever before as seamen, soldiers and merchants, and for exploration or as tourists for education and leisure.



Figure 17.2 Map of Calicut, south-west India, from Georg Braun and Frans Hogenberg, *Civitates Orbis Terrarum*, c.1572. The Stapleton Collection, London, UK. Photo: Bridgeman Images.

Exercise 17.4

Now turn to Anne Gerritsen and Anthony McFarlane, 'Expanding horizons' in the set book and read pages 169–79. Also study maps 3 and 4 on pages 369–70.

As you read, make brief notes in answer to the following questions:

- What were the main trade routes and destinations for European ships?
- Which European states were dominant in trading outside Europe?

- What were the consequences for the people living in territories that were the focus of such trade and colonisation?

This should take around an hour.

There is no discussion for this exercise.

Travel and travelogues

Travel within Europe grew during the eighteenth century, and travel for education and leisure became a must for the elite and also increasingly popular among the middling sort. Many of those who travelled for commerce or pleasure recorded their experiences by means of letters, diaries and journals, some of which were published as travelogues. Such travelogues became one of the fastest-growing genres of publication in the eighteenth century. In this section, which links to your study of print in the chapter ‘Literacy, learning and the printed word’ (Chapter 12) in Book 2, you will study such travelogues in various forms.

The Grand Tour – a trip to Europe usually taking in the major cities of France and Italy, as depicted in Figure 17.3 – was a popular excursion for young gentlemen, mostly from Britain but also from elsewhere in Europe. It had existed since at least the beginning of the sixteenth century but grew particularly popular in the eighteenth century. The aim was for gentlemen, usually travelling in the company of a tutor, to be educated about the culture and landscapes of Europe, with Italy as an important destination. As Rosemary Sweet has argued, though, the Grand Tour did not remain an entirely male aristocratic activity. In the eighteenth century rising numbers of travellers from a broad range of social backgrounds, including ‘older men, family groups, merchants, and professionals, and even single women’, visited the traditional sights of Europe, especially Italy. ‘From the perspective of the Italians, however, they were all *milordi inglesi*’ (Sweet, 2007, p. 839).



Figure 17.3 Katharine Read, *British Gentlemen in Rome*, c.1750, oil on canvas, 95 x 135 cm. Paul Mellon Collection, London, UK. Photo: Yale Center for British Art.

Online session 17.2

Now go to the module website and complete online session 17.2. This should take around 2 hours.

In online session 17.2 you came across a number of travel writings. Other travelogues by well-known authors include one by Celia Fiennes (1662–1741), who in 1702 compiled an account of her extensive travels around Britain in the late seventeenth century, which was not published in a complete version until it appeared in 1888 as *Through England on a Side Saddle*. Other British examples include *A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland* by Dr Samuel Johnson (1709–1784), published in 1775, and *A Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides* by James Boswell (1740–1795), published somewhat later, in 1785; both record a trip taken by the two around Scotland which lasted nearly three months. Europeans also visited Britain and their travelogues cast a new light on society there. *Letters Concerning the English Nation* by Voltaire

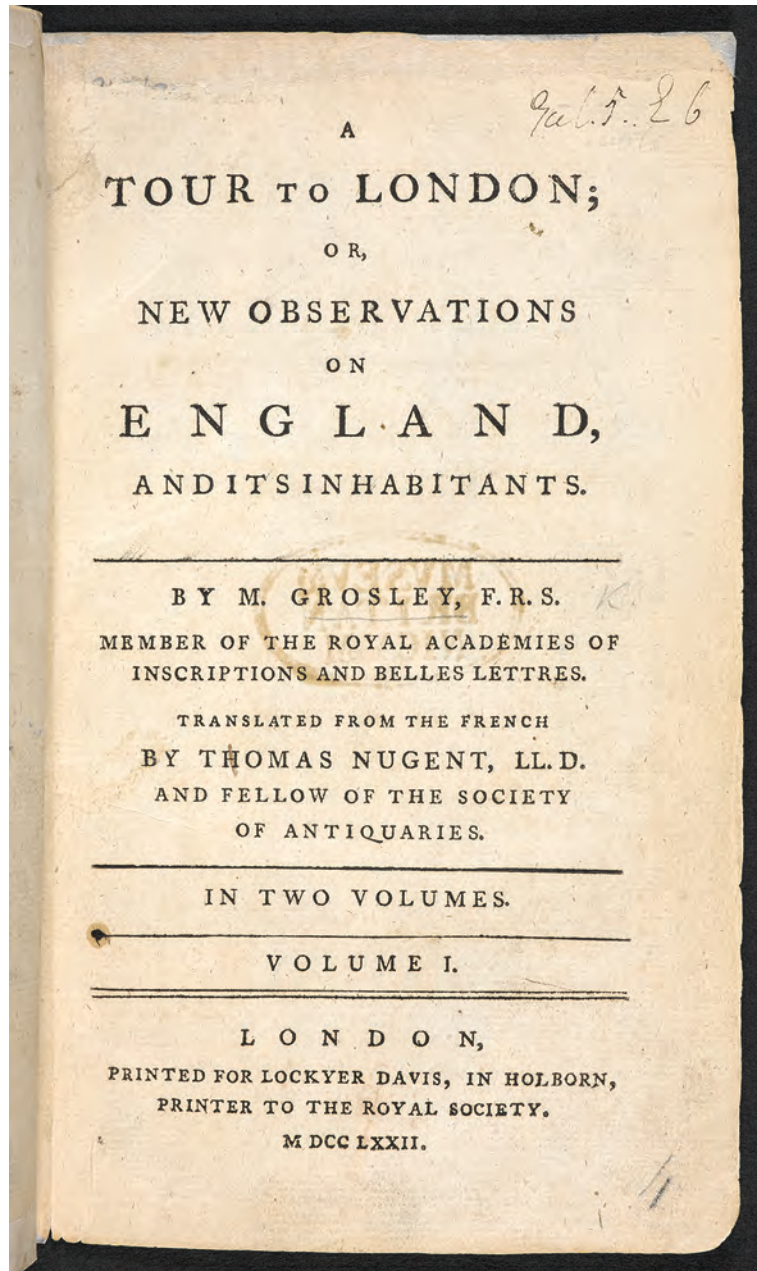


Figure 17.4 The title page from a travelogue written by a Frenchman who visited London. M. Grosley, *A Tour to London: Or, New Observations on England, and Its Inhabitants*, translated from French by Thomas Nugent, 1772. Printed for Lockyer Davies, Holborn, London, UK. Photo: © The British Library Board.

(the pen name of François-Marie Arouet; 1694–1778), first published in 1733, contains observations from the author's stay in England during 1726–28. The letters cover topics such as religion, politics, literature, philosophy and medicine, and were somewhat controversial for their time. It was common for travelogues to include often exhaustive details of every experience the traveller encountered, from the food, to climate, dress, customs, servants' pay, cleanliness and much on scenery and travel experiences along the road. One example is the multi-volume text written by 'Monsieur Grosley' (Pierre-Jean Grosley; 1718–1785) describing his tour of England, published in 1772 (Figure 17.4).

Finally in this section on travel I would like you to consider the topic of space and place in a new and interesting way by studying a fascinating board game about travel which provided yet another form of vicarious travel for eighteenth-century families (Figure 17.5).

The V&A (Victoria and Albert Museum) website tells us that:

[This game] shows a map of England and Wales with the rules and descriptions of some of the towns and cities pasted on either side.

Robert Sayer was one of the leading publishers, producing both games and puzzles from 1754 to 1794 ...

There are 169 principal and county towns joined by lines. The descriptions and rules ... list each town and any rewards or forfeits to be made. There are no charges for moving from one place to another. One of the better rewards occurs at Stonehenge 'worthy of visiting without expense, from whence you are to be removed to Chester at 148'. One of the harshest is at Knaresborough, 163, 'which has four medicinal springs of different qualities; to drink from them you must pay 1 counter and are conveyed to Bath, 2'. The game itself is enlightening, for it not only refers to visiting stately homes, cathedrals, churches and other public buildings but also describes events, folklore, and geographical features.

(V&A, n.d.)



Figure 17.5 A board game, 'A New Royal Geographical Pastime for England and Wales, ... whereby the distance of each town is laid down from London in measured miles[,] being a very amusing game to play with a teetotum [a form of spinning top], ivory pillars and counters. Rewards: extra turns and moves. Forfeits: loss of moves and turns and payment of counters. No. of Players: any. Equipment required: teetotum, ivory pillars (markers), counters', 1787, hand-coloured engraved paper on linen, published by Robert Sayer, London. Victoria and Albert Museum, London, UK. Photo: © Victoria and Albert Museum.

This board game illustrates the interest in travel and maps in the eighteenth century. Clearly it would improve players' knowledge of places beyond their local community or region in England and Wales. It draws attention to some of the important educational and religious sites, reflecting the increase in domestic tourism with visits around Britain to scenic places. It also identifies leisure destinations such as Bath, which was a popular resort for the elite and had a spa where people could drink the water to improve their health. The game also

provides local details such as local folklore and rituals (think back to Chapter 16). Tourism was helped by improved communications and infrastructure: in England in the eighteenth century many turnpike roads were built to carry goods, livestock and people. Note also that maps were popular objects to own in the eighteenth century and another contributor to the growing print industry.

17.4 Issues of identity

The growing awareness of other places and spaces also had an effect on an individual's sense of their own identity. The topic of identity has cropped up through the module, in the sense of the self and the individual in terms of the physical body, gender, religion, politics, rank and status, community and group identities. You have studied selfhood in the chapter 'A sense of self: individualism' (Chapter 8) in Book 1, while the chapter 'Living together' (Chapter 9) in Book 2 provided a comprehensive discussion of early modern identity and characterised it as a predominantly local, community concept for most European people. In this section you will be studying identities in a broader sense in relation to ideas about nationhood and regional and national identities. Travel literature can also provide evidence of attitudes to foreigners and reveal ideas about national identity. First, though, I would like you to recap what you know about the early modern sense of identity.

Exercise 17.5

Thinking back to what you have learned about identity in the module, briefly describe how you think early modern people might have viewed themselves in terms of identity.

This should take around 15 minutes.

Discussion

They would probably have identified themselves in terms of any of the following: family ties, marital status, kinship groups, local community (from hamlet to city), religion, language, region, rank, occupation. You may remember that in Book 1 you came across an Italian woman who described herself in 1591 as 'Orseta Frolade Santo ... from the Friuli. My husband is named Batista Garzolo; I live in San Rocco in the campiello next to the potter, and my occupation is to do piecework, to cook and to spin' (quoted in Chapter 1, p. 42). People were much less likely to describe their identity in terms of nation, state or a wider Europe.

In the eighteenth century, concepts of national identity were beginning to develop and people identified themselves more closely with the 'nation'. This was due partly to increased overseas trade, exploration and colonial expansion, which was accompanied by a greater interest in other cultures and communities among Europeans.

Information about indigenous people and their societies was available from those with first-hand experience and through print in various forms. Travellers approached the people they came across when abroad in different ways, and their accounts were varied and often fragmentary, particularly earlier in our period. There was no concept of 'race' or 'racism' in the early modern period as the terms are understood today, and while biblical, classical and Enlightenment views of black people were influential there was no defining approach to racial difference as emerged in the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, those who were black or of mixed heritage were invariably described in terms of 'difference', and later in our period notions of race were increasingly influenced by ideas and assumptions about nature that were deemed scientific because they were based on prevalent natural knowledge of the time. Such notions of racial differences were increasingly grounded in physical differences which began to create a hierarchy with the white man at the top. You will be learning how thinkers began to apply new 'scientific' and Enlightenment ideas to certain ethnicities in Chapter 23. Despite the lack of clear ideas about racial difference, stereotypical ideas about particular ethnic groups developed, as Figure 17.6 illustrates in relation to the Chinese.

The British Museum website describes the image reproduced in Figure 17.6 as follows:

The Emperor of China (left) reclines on a mattress on a low dais, smoking a long pipe and contemptuously watching, out of his slit-like eyes, Lord Macartney, who kneels on one knee, holding out the King's letter ... The Emperor emits a puff of smoke from a twisted mouth in a subtly insulting manner. Behind him stand two impassive mandarins, their folded hands concealed in their voluminous sleeves. Beside the dais (right) stands a soldier in armour, holding a sword in his clasped hands. The Chinese have pointed beards and moustaches, and long claw-like fingernails. ... Macartney, wearing the insignia of the Bath, kneels in profile to the left, indicating with his left hand a number of presents which have been placed at the Emperor's feet. Five members of his suite



Figure 17.6 James Gillray, *The Reception of the Diplomatie & his Suite, at the Court of Peking, 1792*, hand-coloured etching, 32 x 40 cm. British Museum, London, UK. Photo: © The Trustees of the British Museum.

prostrate themselves behind Macartney, their heads touching the floor so that their faces are hidden and the backs of their breeches are ludicrously conspicuous. Behind are others bringing presents, the two most prominent are ... holding the string of a toy balloon decorated with the royal arms ... and a magpie in a wicker cage. Men crowd behind them carrying, one, a toy coach complete with six horses, driver, postilion, &c, ... another, a rocking-horse; a third holds a weathercock in one hand, a British flag in the other. The objects on the ground are: a volume of 'Boydell's Shakespeare' ... on which is a rat-trap; a bat, trap, and ball, dice-box and dice, a battledore and shuttlecock[;] ... an oval

miniature of George III, to which is attached a child's coral and bells; a toy windmill; a magic-lantern.

(British Museum, n.d.)

Although this etching by James Gillray (1756–1815) is from 1792 and therefore slightly outside our period, it does give an interesting satirical impression of the sort of event that also occurred earlier in the century. It is a satirical representation of a diplomatic delegation from Britain led by Lord George Macartney (1737–1806) to the Chinese emperor's court, offering gifts to encourage good trade terms. Western traders found it hard to gain a foothold in imperial China as it was a powerful state and could dictate terms of trade, hence the elaborate diplomatic delegation and extensive gifts. This mission failed allegedly because Macartney refused to kowtow (kneel with his forehead on the ground) to the Chinese emperor. Gillray's print is poking fun at the event by invoking contemporary racial stereotypes of the Chinese. Note, for example, that many of the gifts offered are children's toys rather than appropriate items for adults, and that the emperor and his court are depicted in physical appearance and dressed in a style imagined by Europeans as 'Chinese', as very different to Europeans. Gillray, a famous satirist of his day, is here accentuating English prejudices and European-focused expectations of such a visit.

Such attitudes to those of a different identity also arose among people living in different parts of Britain and in European countries. Britain provides an example of an increased focus on a national identity after the union of England and Wales with Scotland in 1707, the loss of its American colonies in the American War of Independence (1775–83) and as a result of increased overseas commerce and colonial expansion. As you have learned, one thing that brought more British people into contact with others was increased travel, and many travellers commented on the people and places they came across. Examples can be found in Robert Poole's *A Journey from London, to France and Holland: or, The Traveller's Useful Vade Mecum* (1741), Monsieur Grosley's memoir of a visit to London in 1772 and many letters from travellers.

Online session 17.3

Now go to the module website and complete online session 17.3. This should take around an hour and 30 minutes.



Figure 17.7 James Gillray, *Politeness*, 1780, etching, 20 x 27 cm. British Museum, London, UK. Photo: © The Trustees of the British Museum.

Exercise 17.6

Figure 17.7 reproduces a visual image that provides an anglocentric representation of the English compared with the French – an image that would have been familiar to English people at the time.

Study the image now and answer the following question:

- How does the image characterise relations between the English (represented by John Bull on the left) and the French (represented by the figure on the right)?

This should take around 20 minutes.

Discussion

This cartoon by Gillray from 1780, ironically entitled 'Politeness', depicts the state of relations between Britain and France. John Bull represents the traditional English stout country squire with his practical boots and walking stick. He holds a foaming pint of beer, and a large piece of beef hangs on the wall behind him. He is a fine example of English prosperous, rural masculinity, who lives on plentiful plain food such as roast beef. The figure on the right, in contrast, is a spindly, effeminate Frenchman, with fancy clothes, wig, make-up and snuff. The sword reflects his noble status. On the wall behind him hang a couple of pitiful frogs, reflecting the English contempt for fussy French food. John Bull's dog, a substantial terrier, snarls threateningly at the tiny trembling whippet hiding behind the Frenchman's chair. This image reflects the xenophobia expressed by the English against their greatest enemy, the French. The English compared their freedoms under the English constitution with the restrictions of French absolutism. A common cry of the English people out on the streets was: 'No French popery, garlic and wooden shoes', bringing together Catholicism, French food and the endemic poverty of the French peasants, who wore clogs.

As you have learned in this section, people in Europe were increasingly defining those from different regions or countries as ‘other’ in terms of language, behaviour, dress, food and commercial development. They compared what they saw on their travels with what they were used to at home, often unfavourably. Europeans developed an increasing appetite for travel writings that provided them with access to new lands, regions and places where the landscape, society and culture were explored, often in great depth, and identified as different in one way or another.

17.5 Module themes

So far in this chapter you have studied some new aspects of European society and culture, but I would like you now to think about how we might trace the module themes through the three books. Taking the theme of work and trade, for example, you may remember that in Book 1 you studied the work individual people did and how they supported their families, while in Book 2 you explored how things were manufactured in the early modern period and the development of proto-industries. In Book 3 this theme branches out in two directions. First, in the chapter ‘Early modern Europe: a “consumer revolution”?’ (Chapter 20), you will study the emerging ‘consumer society’ that supported the increased manufacture of goods and enabled not just the elite but people of all ranks to purchase more necessities and ever more luxuries. Going shopping became an increasingly popular activity, with new shops proliferating in cities such as London and Paris, but also in smaller towns and cities. Second, in the chapter ‘Wealth, financial institutions and bubbles’ (Chapter 21), you will learn how financial systems developed and see that by the end of our period innovations had led to the creation of financial and commercial institutions around Europe, such as banks and stock markets, that enabled increased trade and manufacture both at home and overseas.

Another important theme that runs through the module is that of society and social order, where you have studied issues such as social hierarchy and authority. You have already learned about some aspects of European states and government and later in Book 3 you will study politics in more detail than in Books 1 and 2; first, in Chapter 18, in terms of how states and governments were structured, and second, in Chapter 23, in terms of political ideas that emanated from the Enlightenment.

Historians writing for this module have identified a clear hierarchy in much of Europe, with the nobility and higher clergy at the pinnacle and then everybody else as the people. This social order remained pretty stable during the early modern period, except for the emerging middling sort, which, as Deborah Brunton explained in Chapter 1, grew notably but not evenly around Europe. This growth accelerated during the eighteenth century, leading to the identification of a ‘middle class’ in the nineteenth century. While European people functioned within the social hierarchy, their individual experiences would have

varied considerably depending on their rank, status, gender, ethnicity and the place where they lived. Experiences were also very diverse within a community and between communities, urban and rural, large or small.

Religion was very important in the lives of early modern people as part of their internal existence and identity, as the chapter ‘Popular Christianity and personal faith’ (Chapter 2) in Book 1 explained, and as something they shared as a community in villages, towns and cities, as you saw in the chapter ‘The Reformation and local communities’ (Chapter 13) in Book 2. The Reformation led to many more diverse Protestant churches emerging in Europe, and those who dissented from the local norm would often find themselves banished or forced to practise in private and clandestine ways. In the chapter ‘Religious conflict, emigration and coexistence’ (Chapter 19) you will learn how religion and the important role it held within European states led to wider conflict and war within Europe, but also how diverse religious groups managed to coexist.

Another theme you have explored is knowledge and ideas, particularly in the study of print in Chapter 12. In the chapter ‘Old and new knowledge’ (Chapter 22), and in Chapter 23, you will study this theme more directly by exploring how the early modern period experienced changes in knowledge and ideas: political, cultural, scientific, and in terms of health and the body. As part of a traditional understanding of the relationships between people and nature, astrology had for centuries provided knowledge such as predicting weather and understanding climate and also disease (see Figure 17.8 for a depiction of an astrological sign, Aquarius). During the eighteenth century astrology was marginalised as significant changes occurred in the way the world and its people were viewed. Such changes have led some historians to talk of a ‘Scientific Revolution’ occurring during this period (although the term ‘science’ was not used until the nineteenth century). How far there was such a Scientific Revolution remains a matter of debate among historians. In terms of the theme relating to health, you will be studying how new knowledge changed how the body was understood, but that did not necessarily change the way sick people were treated. Innovations in childbirth provide an interesting case study here.



Figure 17.8 Unknown artist, Italian School, *Aquarius*, fifteenth century, fresco. Palazzo della Ragione, Padua, Italy. Photo: Bridgeman Images.

The Enlightenment is a key aspect of the theme of ideas that you will study in Book 3. It was an important movement of European thinkers who focused on reason, rationality and scientific observation as means to understand the world. They promoted ideas of liberty, humanity and the potential for human progress and they rejected traditional authorities, particularly the Catholic Church. They challenged the

fundamental Christian precept that people are born with original sin, stating instead that individuals are born *tabula rasa*; that is, as a blank slate on which their character is written in accordance with their experiences. The Enlightenment was a forward-looking movement that also incorporated political and economic ideas. As Anthony Pagden puts it: ‘unlike either the Renaissance or the Reformation, the Enlightenment had begun not as an attempt to rescue some hallowed past, but as an assault on the past in the name of the future’; it was essentially a critical movement, placing reason at the centre of thought (Pagden, 2015, p. 10). Ultimately, Enlightenment thinkers believed in the potential for continuing progress towards a civilisation where all peoples would be enlightened.

Such new ideas and knowledge were spread by the burgeoning print industry. As you learned in Chapter 12, the amount of printed material available increased dramatically, in terms of volume and content, in our period and particularly in the eighteenth century. New secular publications such as travelogues, history and novels became very popular and challenged the previous predominance of Christian texts. The growth in newspapers, pamphlets, broadsides and other topical material aided the spread of information through all sectors of society. Consequently, during the eighteenth century the importance of the concept of ‘public opinion’ began to be recognised by the governing elite; that is, there was a recognition that the views of ordinary people could together form significant opinions on political, social, cultural and economic issues.

Throughout the module we have explored the balance of continuity and change. An overview of the module themes studied in this book suggests that there was a lot of change, particularly towards the end of our period. It is tempting to see this as progress, but progress is a tricky concept for historians as it suggests enduring positive change. Things do not always move forward in a positive way but in fits and starts; or sometimes they regress, or stay the same. Take the Enlightenment, for example: this was a self-consciously forward-thinking eighteenth-century phenomenon that focused on progress, yet today historians are cautious about identifying it entirely in such a way. Ancient classical thought was important in the thinking of the Enlightenment, although this involved using such ideas to shape the future rather than rediscover the past. Moreover, old and new ideas and knowledge often coexisted, rather than one completely eclipsing the other, as in the management of childbirth. Christianity continued to

be a powerful force, despite some aspects being identified as superstition by science and the Enlightenment. Indeed, many early modern scientists, or ‘natural philosophers’, as they were generally called, were themselves devout Christians. Thus religious and secular ideas ran parallel, reflecting both continuity and change. As you have learned above, another obvious continuity is provided by political rights, in that the vast majority of early modern European people did not have political rights such as the right to vote. It was not until the French Revolution (1789–99) that the concept of government where sovereignty lay in the nation, the people, was legitimised and government became more secular.

17.6 Skills

Throughout Books 1 and 2 you have been developing your skills as a historian and in this final book you will be embedding and improving those skills. In particular, you will be further developing your critical analysis skills over a range of primary sources. Don't forget that primary sources provide historians with access to the past: the evidence of events, culture and ideas. They also provide different contemporary voices and views and additional information that may not be part of the writer's original message but is useful to the historian. You have already learned how we analyse primary sources and have practised this methodology in this chapter. It is always important to explore the provenance of a source as well as considering what the source tells us about our topic of study. It is also necessary to be aware of the surrounding context within which the source should be placed.

In Book 3 you will also be improving your analytical skills in reading academic articles and different authorial voices (think back to Chapter 16, where some of this was provided for you). As you have seen, historians write in very different ways, using a variety of styles and methodologies. They do not always share the same views; indeed, they promote argument and debate through their writings. This is because history writing is very much a matter of interpretation. One historian will interpret a set of primary sources, reach a conclusion and develop a thesis based on the evidence they find there. Another will perhaps view the same sources from another perspective, within a different context or in conjunction with other sources, and consequently develop a new thesis. History, then, never stands still and historians contribute to the ever-growing historiography in their field.

You will also be writing longer and more complex essays. TMA 05 covers more than one chapter of the module, and this will give you an opportunity to expand and improve your writing and analytical skills. Referencing will also be an important focus in this book. Although it might seem rather unexciting, good referencing is of vital importance in any academic writing. The purpose of referencing is to enable your reader to easily identify the source of your evidence, and, as you know, history writing is based on evidence, so it is important that you can show exactly where it comes from.

Finally, this book will help you to start thinking about the end-of-module examination, and you should have this in the back of your mind as you work through the chapters. It is important to consider the module themes and topics across not just one chapter but all the chapters in a book, and across the whole module. For example, the Enlightenment may appear to be very much an eighteenth-century phenomenon, but it should not be viewed in isolation. Rather, consider it in relation to what went before in terms of ideas – religious, scientific, political and so on – in a broader context. You might ask yourself what ideas were dominant before the Enlightenment and how did ideas change in response to this important movement?

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Readings

Reading 17.1 Danske Lov (1683)

Source: Article 1, Danske Lov (1683) translated by Thomas Munck, quoted in Munck, T. (2005) *Seventeenth-Century Europe: State Conflict and Social Order in Europe 1598–1700*, 2nd edn, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 364–5.

[The monarch] alone has supreme authority to draw up laws and ordinances according to his will and pleasure, and to elaborate, change, extend, delimit and even entirely annul laws previously promulgated by himself or his ancestors. He can likewise exempt from the letter of the law whatsoever or whomsoever he wishes. He alone has supreme power and authority to appoint or dismiss at will all officials regardless of their rank, name or title; thus offices and functions of all kinds must derive their authority from the absolute power of the King. He has sole supreme authority over the entire clergy, from the highest to the lowest, in order to regulate church functions and divine service. He orders or prohibits as he sees fit all meetings and assemblies on religious affairs, in accordance with the word of God and the Augsburg Confession. He alone has the right to arm his subjects, to conduct war, and to conclude or abrogate alliances with whomever he wishes at any time. He can impose customs dues and taxes as he wishes. In short, the King alone has the power to use all *jura majestatis* and regalian rights, whatever they may be called. For this reason all the King's subjects (of whatever status) who live in his kingdoms or own property here, together with their household and servants, must as good hereditary subjects respect the King as the highest being on earth, raised above all human law and liable to no judgment in religious or secular matters save that of God alone. All subjects must be obedient, humble and faithful to the King, their protector, and must seek to forward the King's cause, do their utmost to prevent harm or disruption, and serve the King faithfully with life and property. All subjects are bound by oath to resist anyone (native or foreign) who may act or speak against the King's absolute hereditary rights, on pain of forfeiting life, honour and property.

[p. 365]

Reading 17.2 Extract from *The True Law of Free Monarchies* (1598)

Source: Perry, M., Peden, J. R. and Von Laue, T. H. (eds) (1991) *Sources of the Western Tradition*, vol. 1: *From Ancient Times to the Enlightenment*, 2nd edn, Princeton, NJ, Houghton Mifflin Company, pp. 371–2.

[James VI of Scotland and I of England anonymously published this work, in which he declared that:]

According to these fundamental laws already alleged, we daily see that in the parliament (which is nothing else but the head court of the king and his vassals) the laws are but craved by his subjects, and only made by him at their [proposal] and with their advice: for albeit the king makes daily statutes and ordinances, [imposing] such pains thereto as he thinks [fit], without any advice of parliament or estates, yet it lies in the power of no parliament to make any kind of law or statute, without his sceptre [that is authority] be to it, for giving it the force of a law. ... And as ye see it manifest that the king is over-lord of the whole land, so is he master over every person that inhabiteth the same, having power over the life and death of every one of them: for although a just prince will not take the life of any of his subjects without a clear law, yet the same laws whereby he taketh them are made by himself or his predecessors; and so the power flows away from himself. ... general laws made publicly in parliament may upon ... [the king's] authority be mitigated and suspended upon causes only known to him. ... So as I have already said, a good king, though he be above the law, will subject and frame his actions thereto, for example's sake to his subjects, and of his own free will, but not as subject or bound thereto. [p.372]

Reading 17.3 Extract from a speech before the English Parliament in March 1610

Source: Perry, M., Peden, J. R. and Von Laue, T. H. (eds) (1991) *Sources of the Western Tradition*, vol. 1: *From Ancient Times to the Enlightenment*, 2nd edn, Princeton, NJ, Houghton Mifflin Company, p. 372.

[In this speech James VI of Scotland and I of England declared that:]

The state of monarchy is the supremest thing upon earth: for kings are not only God's lieutenants upon earth and sit upon God's throne, but even by God himself they are called gods. ... In the Scriptures kings are called gods, and so their power after a certain relation compared to the Divine power. Kings are also compared to fathers of families: for a king is truly *parens patriae* [parent of the country], the politic father of his people. And lastly, kings are compared to the head of this microcosm of the body of man. ...

I conclude then this point touching the power of kings with this axiom of divinity, That as to dispute what God may do is blasphemy, ... so is it sedition in subjects to dispute what a king may do in the height of his power.

[He went on to warn Parliament:]

First, that you do not meddle with the main points of government: that is my craft ... to meddle with that, were to lessen me. I am now an old king;

I must not be taught my office.

Secondly, I would not have you meddle with such ancient rights of mine as I have received from my predecessors, possessing them *more majorum* [as ancestral customs]: [...] All novelties are dangerous as well in a politic as in a natural body: and therefore I would be loath to be quarrelled in my ancient rights and possessions: for that were to judge me unworthy of that which my predecessors had and left me.

Chapter 18 States and people: the growth of governance in early modern Europe

Neil Younger

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Learning outcomes

By the end of this chapter you should be able to:

- understand the nature of early modern states and how they differed from modern states
- understand how and why states developed in the early modern period, and some of the outcomes that could result
- understand how individuals of various kinds could engage with and pursue their interests through the state.

Introduction

The early modern period saw considerable development in the nature of states and governments, part of an ongoing story of the evolution of states from the Middle Ages through to the present. Although the development of states is traditionally regarded as an aspect of political history rather than the social and cultural history which is the focus of the module, these changes in fact had many important effects on the lives of all early modern people.

In this chapter you will be looking at how and why the activities of states grew and developed in the early modern period. You will approach this in two ways, first from a 'top-down' view and second from a 'bottom-up' perspective. This division reflects different ways in which historians have approached the topic: traditionally, historians have tended to focus on monarchs or rulers (which are, after all, the most visible, noticeable element of the state) and what they were doing. This reflects one way of looking at the state: as the possession and the tool of rulers, designed to fulfil the monarch's will and to enable what they wanted to achieve. One of the most obvious ways in which they did this was to facilitate a monarch's desire to go to war. In that circumstance the state was the organisation through which monarchs raised money and troops to go to war, which was in many ways the most complex and expensive thing that early modern states did. Some historians, indeed, have described the early modern state as in effect a machine for making war, and have argued in turn that war drove states to develop in response: 'war made the state, and the state made war' (Tilly, 1975, p. 42).

An alternative way to see a state, however, is as an organisation intended to serve the good of all the people living within it. Early modern thinkers insisted that, although monarchs were the heads of their states, they had a solemn duty to serve the good of their subjects, something which many monarchs swore to uphold as part of their coronation oaths (see Figure 18.1). Moreover, people at all levels of society were keen to engage in the state to pursue their own interests.



Figure 18.1 Cornelius Schut, *The Coronation of Charles V, Holy Roman Emperor*, seventeenth century, oil on canvas. Musée Ingres, Montauban, France. Photo: Bridgeman Images.

Furthermore, while early modern monarchs (who ruled in most European states) may have aspired to absolute power, in practice successful rule required cooperation, particularly from the elites such as the church (who had spiritual power) and the nobility (who had military and economic power). Monarchs needed these groups to help them govern, since they had no police force or army powerful enough to enforce compliance. In order to win cooperation, rulers had to give something in return, to be flexible or to negotiate. ‘The effectiveness of government did not, indeed could not, rest on coercion alone but also and more routinely depended on the willing co-operation of local elites’ (Braddick, 2004, p. 8).

In practice, of course, states balanced all these aspects; they were the means by which monarchs pursued their ends, but also set many of the conditions for their subjects’ daily lives, and therefore affected everyone. Although far from any modern notion of a democracy, therefore, early modern states can be seen as arenas in which many people, not only royal or noble elites, engaged, and in which everyone had some kind of an interest – even if that interest was as simple a matter as whether they lived their lives in peace or in war, in chaos or in order.

18.1 States: the basics

Let us first spend a short time thinking about the basics: what states were and what they did.

Exercise 18.1

Spend a few minutes thinking about what the state (through both central and local government) does in modern developed countries. You can jot down some notes if you wish. One way of doing this would be to think about ways in which you encounter the state in your everyday life.

This should take around 5 minutes.

Discussion

If you live in a modern developed country, you encounter the state in a huge variety of ways every day, both visibly and invisibly. You walk or drive on roads constructed by the state. You occasionally visit hospitals or doctor's surgeries paid for by the state. Children are educated by the state. Security is provided by armed forces and police services run by the state. The state regulates the products you buy and the shops and businesses that provide them. Trains and buses are subsidised and regulated by the state. You also pay taxes to fund all of this – every time you are paid, and every time you buy something, you pay tax.

This exercise highlights the immense number of ways in which the modern state impinges on people's lives. The situation was very different in the early modern period. States were vastly weaker. They had few people working for them. Their armed forces were comparatively small, and there were no police forces. States had relatively little money, never enough to do everything they wanted. They had poor communication with the more distant parts of their territories.

In this situation, states' activities were restricted to what we might consider the basics. What were these? Although it is impossible to be definitive, we can identify a number of central functions of a state:

- *Keeping social order and administering justice.* This was absolutely crucial to ensure that people were able to go about their daily business without encountering violence or force.
- *Defence of the state.* This point, which is linked to the previous one, again centres on making sure that the state's subjects were able to live in peace.
- *Making war overseas.* This was not an essential matter, but it was something that monarchs often wanted to do, or felt the need to do.
- *Raising money* to cover the costs of all the other activities.

Early modern monarchs inherited from their medieval forebears some important achievements. The first of these was a basis of reasonably good social order. What this means is that people did not live in any kind of anarchy, in which the strong took advantage of the weak. This had been achieved by laying down laws to regulate behaviour, stating that actions such as murder, theft and many others were crimes and unacceptable. These laws were then enforced by the king's courts and his officials. This is a situation so natural and obvious to modern-day Europeans now that it is taken for granted, but it is in fact something which is remarkably hard to achieve and can easily break down. This had happened, for example, following the collapse of the western Roman Empire in the fifth century CE, and European states took centuries to re-establish an effective rule of law. Early modern thinkers recognised this possibility and had an intense fear of disorder. In his book *Leviathan*, the political thinker Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679) wrote about the consequences of the breakdown of government, something that he witnessed during the English civil wars. When the state breaks down, he wrote:

men live without other security, than what their own strength, and their own invention shall furnish them withall. In such condition, there is no place for Industry; because the fruit thereof is uncertain: and consequently no Culture of the Earth; no Navigation, nor use of the commodities that may be imported by Sea; no commodious Building; no Instruments of moving, and removing things as require much force; no Knowledge of the face of the Earth; no account of Time; no Arts; no Letters; no Society; and which is worst of all, continuall feare, and danger of

violent death; And the life of man, solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short.

(Hobbes, 1651, vol. II, p. 192)

The last sentence of Hobbes's quote is very well known, but it is still a powerful thought. Without strong government to guarantee social order, he said, industry, agriculture and trade become impossible, because the produce thereof can be taken from the producer by force. Without an effective economy, learning and society are equally impossible. Above all, people live in fear of violence. His conclusion, therefore, was that no civilisation can exist without a strong state. The creation of an ordered society with an effective rule of law, what was sometimes called 'the king's peace', was a real achievement.

A second inherited aspect of the state's role was the provision and maintenance of the currency. Again, this is so fundamental an issue that it can easily be forgotten, but without a stable currency that everyone can trust, the existence of a complex economy becomes impossible. The truth of this can be seen on occasions when early modern monarchs in desperate search of money, usually to fight wars, chose to debase their currency by reducing the content of silver or gold in coins. Because no one knew exactly what coins were worth, economic activity became impossible: there was frequently economic disaster and large-scale inflation, which hit the poorest in society hardest. You can hear more about this topic in this week's film, 'A Tudor shilling', in the 'Early modern world in objects' section on the module website.

Exercise 18.2

Now turn to Humfrey Butters, 'The theory and practice of politics and government' in the set book and read pages 252–62. As you read, consider the following question:

- What major developments in early modern politics and government are outlined by Butters?

This should take around an hour.

Discussion

Butters notes a series of important changes in early modern politics and government. These include a growing tendency for rulers to legislate (that is, make new laws); a growth of new forms of taxation and money-raising; and a growth in the government's role in social policy. He also sees the Reformation as an important development, which created new opportunities for rulers to take powers over the church, but also led to problems of religious disunity and sometimes resistance to state power. As Butters makes clear, however, there were strong elements of continuity from the medieval and indeed classical past, in both the institutions and structures of government and in the ideas which underlay them.

18.2 State building: the view from above

The module concludes very close to one of the great events of modern history, the French Revolution (1789–99), a profoundly important landmark in the development of democratic states. As we know, modern developed states are vastly more democratic than those in the past. Yet it would be a mistake to think that there was steady progress in this direction throughout history. In general, early modern states were not getting more democratic or more limited in their power. In fact, precisely the reverse was the case: there was steady growth in the power of the monarchs who headed most European states.

This occurred primarily because rulers and those around them took conscious, deliberate actions to try to increase their power. This is a process that historians often describe as ‘state building’, and in this section you will look at some of the ways in which they did this and how successful they were. In this section, ‘the state’ is largely synonymous with the ruler or the monarch, or at least those working in the ruler’s name.

We can identify a whole series of processes which took place within developing early modern states, as the following sections will show.

Attacks on rival sources of power

As you have read, medieval states had been limited in their power. A major reason for this was the existence of other powerful groups within society, which challenged the state. Over the course of the early modern period, the state sought to diminish their ability to do so.

The first of these rival groups was the church. Religious authorities could claim access to immense power over people’s immortal souls. In the Middle Ages, church and state were often seen as fairly equal partners, but early modern states sought to tilt the balance in their own favour. The Reformation played an important role in this process, as rulers who turned Protestant assumed the headship of their churches and rejected the Pope. The head of state became head of the church too, and religious power became simply one (important) aspect of state power. As you have seen, this allowed rulers in Britain, Germany and Scandinavia to appropriate church property, providing them with a

financial boost as well as the opportunity to use church patronage to reward their friends and allies with lucrative jobs. Catholic monarchs also tended to increase their power over the church in their territories, however, as successive popes were simply unable to match the growing power of European monarchs.

If the church was one of the medieval state's great rivals for power, the other was the nobility. As you saw in the chapter 'The European elite: nobility and gentry' (Chapter 7) in Book 1, the nobility's wealth and status often made them the effective rulers of their regions. In addition, they influenced political events at the centre, by advising the monarch, sitting in representative assemblies, or even rebelling. Furthermore, the nobles had a strong military identity and they controlled the instruments of force, such as castles and cannon, and could raise armies themselves. While the nobility were ordinarily loyal to the monarchy, this could never be taken for granted. Early modern rulers therefore sought to put the nobles in their place, and excessively powerful or rebellious nobles were attacked in various ways, especially if they engaged in (or even contemplated) rebellion or treason.

A third rival was the various representative assemblies. Most states had some form of assembly, containing representation from the church, the nobility, and usually the towns or common people. In England, Scotland and Ireland these were called parliaments, in France and the Netherlands the estates, or states, general, in Spain the Cortes, and so on. These varied in power, and tended to represent the propertied classes rather than the people as a whole, but monarchs often needed their cooperation to raise taxes and pass new laws, both for reasons of custom or tradition, and for practical reasons, to gain the help of powerful groups within the state.

Early modern monarchs increasingly resented this need to make compromises, however, and sought to do without them. Charles I of England (1600–1649, reigned 1625–49), facing determined opposition from Parliament in the early years of his reign, famously ruled without it between 1629 and 1640, an attempt which collapsed when rebellion in Scotland made the need for new taxes acute. The French monarchs were much more successful, failing to call the Estates General at all between 1614 and the collapse of the monarchy in 1789.

In all three cases – church, nobility and assemblies – the monarchy was therefore usually fairly successful in restricting the power of rivals.

War and the creation of fiscal-military states

Monarchs sought to assert themselves within their territories, and also beyond them: they sought to increase their territory and, often, to absorb neighbouring states. France is a classic example of this trend. Having defeated the English in the Hundred Years' War in the mid-fifteenth century, and resumed control of Gascony in the south-west and Normandy in the north, the monarchy then engineered the absorption of Brittany into France (in 1532). In the seventeenth century monarchs sought to expand French territory to the north and east, into Flanders, Lorraine and Alsace, even into historically German areas. Another example of this development occurred in Italy, where small states were swallowed up by their neighbours: Florence, for instance, conquered Siena in 1555, and Milan and Naples became part of the Spanish Empire.

These territorial expansions were linked to major growth in the scale of warfare, often referred to as a 'military revolution', in the early modern period. Monarchs used their states as 'machines for the battlefield', as mechanisms to raise armies. Across Europe, armies and navies grew bigger and wars lasted longer. Warfare became more complex, demanding more highly trained soldiers and more complex equipment. Increasingly, warfare became professionalised. Whereas medieval soldiers had often been barely trained peasants who were recruited into the army in spring and sent home in autumn, they now became professional soldiers who served for years on end in permanent armies and navies. These armies required new institutions to run them: war departments, ordnance offices, navy departments, shipyards and so on.

In order to pay for all this, states needed much more money. In a cash-poor economy like early modern Europe, most people had very few spare resources, so this was a very difficult task. Monarchs and their ministers went to enormous lengths to design new forms of tax, construct the machinery to collect the money, and gain political consent from their parliaments. As you learned in the chapter 'Popular action: ritual, protest and riot' (Chapter 16) in Book 2, very often tax demands prompted protest, riot or even full-scale rebellion, but the general trend was inexorably upwards (see Figure 18.2). When tax incomes proved insufficient, as they often did, monarchs resorted to less palatable approaches: selling assets, devaluing the currency and (most commonly of all) borrowing, often at ruinous rates of interest.



Figure 18.2 Paul Vos, *The Tax Collector*, 1543, oil on canvas. Galleria Sabauda, Turin, Italy. Photo: Bridgeman Images.

These developments led to the creation of what historians often call ‘fiscal-military states’: states that were increasingly preoccupied by raising money (the ‘fiscal’ aspect) to fund warfare. This did not mean that they abandoned their other functions (such as justice or social order), but that fiscal-military concerns came to dominate their work. This was a process which went on at different speeds throughout the period, but tended to accelerate during times of warfare. In England, for example, the civil wars of the 1640s were a particularly important phase, as were the wars against France in the 1690s.

Expansion of the state's functions

The development of these fiscal-military abilities was a major growth in the work of states, representing a transfer of power from the nobility (who had previously taken the lead in raising armies for the king) to

the state's servants. A similar process of increasing state activity can be seen in other areas too: states were doing more to regulate the lives and behaviour of their subjects by passing new laws and issuing regulations, instructions and ordinances.

These new state activities were very diverse. In the wake of the Reformation, for example, states increasingly took control of religious life within their territories, particularly in Protestant states; the church became in effect a department of the state. This led them into matters such as deciding on doctrine and punishing those who deviated from the official religion.

States also increasingly regulated trade and economic life, setting wages and regulating markets, apprenticeships and so on (Braddick, 2000, pp. 114–16). They sought to increase foreign trade by granting charters to companies such as the (English) East India Company and the Dutch East Indies Company, or Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie.

A third area of growth was in social matters, such as poverty relief, as you saw in the chapter 'Living in poverty and life on the margins' (Chapter 6) in Book 1. The English Poor Law of 1598–1601 is a very good example. Poverty was a particular problem in the 1590s, due both to long-term trends and to especially poor harvests in that decade. Parliament therefore passed the Poor Law, under which officials in every parish collected small sums of tax from wealthier inhabitants and distributed them to the most deserving or desperate paupers. The Poor Law might not seem very impressive by modern European standards, but it shows that government action was increasingly seen as an important way of resolving problems. Whereas poor relief had previously been dealt with by local communities, individual charity or the church, the state now chose to take responsibility for the problem, and in effect the officials in the parishes who implemented the Poor Law became representatives of the state. What is particularly striking about the Poor Law is that it drew heavily on local schemes for poor relief which had been set up in cities such as Norwich, Salisbury and London on the initiative of local governments. 'The poor law ... grew out of such local initiatives and is a good illustration of the fact that the development of the state was not a matter of central, still less

monarchical, will – the poor law of the later sixteenth century was Elizabethan, not Elizabeth's' (Braddick, 2000, p. 24; see also p. 111).

As this analysis suggests, many of these developments were welcomed by the state's subjects – or, to be more precise, by sections of its subjects. In the case of trade, for example, merchants naturally welcomed the state's guaranteeing of their trade companies. Similarly, local officials saw the Poor Law as a useful solution to a major social problem. This is not to say that the state was a universally popular force, but that state building was not always forced on the people – they often chose to cooperate with it. In this sense, we can see the state as a forum for issues to be debated and solutions found. When people identified a problem, they became more likely to turn to the state to resolve it.

Developments in the structures of government

In order to carry out their new responsibilities, monarchs needed to reform the structures of government. They sought to develop cadres of suitable individuals to serve the state as professional administrators, often highly educated, university-trained lawyers drawn from the lower levels of the landed elite: the likes of Thomas Cromwell (1485–1540) or William Cecil (1520–1598) in England, Cardinal Richelieu (1585–1642) in France, or Cardinal Granvelle (1517–1586; see Figure 18.3) in the Netherlands. Monarchs set up new councils and departments to create the beginnings of a civil service.

Monarchs also sought to rationalise their governments. Most early modern states lacked uniform structures of government: their internal governing arrangements varied from place to place, with special privileges and laws applying in different areas. France is a good example of this: neat and uniform as it appeared on a map, it was in practice a patchwork of territories, counties, duchies and provinces, governed and taxed in different ways, and very difficult to run from Paris. Monarchs therefore made efforts to create greater centralisation and uniformity in government.



Figure 18.3 Scipione Pulzone (Il Gaetano), *Cardinal Antoine Perronot de Granvelle*, 1576, oil on canvas. Musée du Temps, Besançon, France. Photo: Bridgeman Images. Cardinal Granvelle, a Burgundian nobleman, was a long-serving minister and adviser to Charles V.

Glorifying the monarchy

Royal propaganda was used extensively to support all of the above efforts, in particular propaganda which elevated the monarch personally. As many of the developments outlined above suggest, this was an age of iconic rulers such as Henry VIII of England (1491–1547, reigned 1509–1547), the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V (1500–1558, reigned 1519–56) and Louis XIV of France (1638–1715, reigned 1643–1715). Monarchs as the representatives of the state came to be ever more prominent, no longer seen as ‘first among equals’ with the nobility but as elevated, semi-divine figures, entrusted by God with the rule of their people.

Online session 18.1

Now go to the module website and complete online session 18.1. This should take around an hour.

To summarise, therefore, the developments outlined above were a process whereby ever more authority became vested in the state, which increasingly took on a fiscal-military aspect. There is no simple, straightforward timescale for this process, although historians have identified various phases of particularly intensive state-building. In the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries there was a period of rapid development by monarchs such as Henry VII of England (1457–1509, reigned 1485–1509), Louis XI of France (1423–1483, reigned 1461–83) and Ferdinand (1452–1516) and Isabella (1451–1504), who jointly ruled the whole of Spain from 1492, which historians refer to as the ‘new monarchies’ because of their effective rule. As you learned in the chapter ‘Broader horizons’ (Chapter 17), seventeenth-century monarchs such as Louis XIV of France are seen as characteristic of an ‘Age of Absolutism’. These were important phases, but in reality state-building occurred throughout Europe at different paces and with different levels of success. Often it was slow and haphazard; often ‘progress’ was reversed. In Spain, for example, while the early sixteenth century was marked by an assertive, centralising royal government, the pressures of war later in the century saw a ‘failure of centralised, absolutist government’, leading to a return to dependence on the power of the nobility (Thompson, 1976, pp. 146–59; quote at p. 146).

The Habsburg rulers of the Holy Roman Empire, too, failed in their efforts to increase their power over the small German states and make the empire an effective state.

Nevertheless, over time the efforts of rulers to strengthen their power undoubtedly had considerable effect, with one development and reform building on another in a cumulative fashion. You can now see some of these processes in action through two case studies.

Case study 1: Louis XIV's France

The classic case of a strong and effective early modern monarch is Louis XIV of France, who came to the throne in 1643. Louis's reign began with disaster. During its early years, between 1648 and 1653, while he was still a child, a huge rebellion known as the Fronde paralysed France. The rebels included not only the lower classes, but more importantly the aristocracy, and it surely convinced Louis of the need for strong government and strict order.

The king's own powerful character was in many ways at the centre of this. He dominated his kingdom through force of personality, which as you've seen in online session 18.1 he projected through his lavish, elaborate and dignified court. His priority was to assert his monarchy, both within France and abroad. In terms of the latter, he fought many long wars with considerable success, extending his territory in the south, north and east. Louis often campaigned in person (see Figure 18.4), seeing the military persona shared by nobles and monarchs as important to maintaining his status. These successful wars greatly enhanced his prestige.

Louis's influence was, however, even more significant within his own borders. He paid close personal attention to affairs of state and finance, acting as his own chief minister (Collins, 1995, pp. 84, 88). He employed a small number of highly trusted and mostly very competent ministers, notably Jean-Baptiste Colbert (1619–1683), who sought to intervene ever more closely in the government of France. New officials were also brought in: the old, 'venal' office-holders, who owned their offices as property and could not be dismissed by the king, were sidelined, while newer commissioners, who served at the king's pleasure and were therefore much more responsive to his demands, became more important (Collins, 1995, pp. 93–4). Louis also asserted control over religion by deliberately provoking disputes with the Pope to

strengthen his own control over the church in France and by ending the **toleration** of the Huguenots (French Protestants) which had existed since 1598: he insisted that he would control the French Catholic Church, and all of his subjects had to belong to it (Collins, 1995, pp. 101–3).



Figure 18.4 Adam Frans van der Meulen, *Louis XIV at a Siege*, c.1678, oil on canvas, 53 x 63 cm. Apsley House, The Wellington Museum, London, UK. Photo: © Historic England / Bridgeman Images.

Exercise 18.3

Turn to Readings 18.1, 'Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet, Bishop of Meaux, on the nature of absolute kingship, 1678' and 18.2, 'Louis XIV on taking up personal rule, 10 March 1661', two contemporary sources, located at the end of the chapter.

- What can you learn from these sources about the nature of Louis's kingship?

This should take around 15 minutes.

Discussion

These two documents, because of their different origins, present subtly different sides of Louis XIV's absolutism. Reading 18.1 is an idealised picture, presenting the *theory* of absolutist monarchy: divinely ordained and largely infallible. This should reflect what you have already read in Chapter 17. As you have also read, however, in reality this ideal was not easy to achieve. Reading 18.2 shows us the young Louis taking his first steps in trying to do this, seeking to assert absolute rule by personally controlling all matters of state and concentrating power in his own hands.

Many of Louis's changes caused problems of one kind or another. His moves against the Huguenots, for example, led at least 200,000 of them, often skilled people, valuable to France's economy, to emigrate (Briggs, 1998, p. 147); you will read more about this in the chapter 'Religious conflict, emigration and coexistence' (Chapter 19). His attempts to increase trade were often ineffective. Above all, perhaps, his wars were ruinously expensive to taxpayers. It seemed as if the monarch's desire for *gloire* (glory) had eclipsed all other considerations and the state had become a tool to enhance the status of its head: the state served the monarch and not vice versa. Nevertheless, according to his own objectives Louis was a great success in asserting control over every aspect of French life.

Case study 2: Louis XIV's imitators

Louis XIV's France was undoubtedly admired by rulers across Europe, who wished to emulate his success in freeing his rule from tiresome constraints. The duchy of Württemberg is a good example. Württemberg was one of the small states that made up much of Germany; in theory it was subordinate to the Holy Roman Emperor, but in practice it had a good deal of independence; it was a medium-sized fish in the very large pond that was the empire, not in the first rank like Saxony or Bavaria, but equally not a minnow.

The rulers of Württemberg in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries 'drew both ... cultural and ... political aspirations from the French monarchy at Versailles' (Vann, 1984, p. 133). Court ritual, as at

Versailles, became more formal, dignified, fashion-conscious – and French-speaking (Vann, 1984, pp. 135–6):

The new residences built by German princes in the later seventeenth century were intended, like the French palace at Versailles, to symbolise the new, more assertive style of rule associated with absolutism. Like Versailles, many of these new palaces were sited apart from the old capitals and so underlined the ruler's intention to govern without the constraints imposed in the past by the estates.

(Wilson, 1995, p. 28)

As at Versailles, this display was intended to impress both domestic audiences such as the nobility, and foreign rulers (see Figure 18.5).



Figure 18.5 Ludwigsburg Palace, Baden-Württemberg, Germany, 2006.
Photo: Mercy from Wikimedia Commons.

Württemberg also sought to imitate more powerful monarchs in more tangible ways, such as the development of a (small) standing army. The duke's pretensions to French-style absolutism were also marked by his disinclination to be limited by the representative assembly, the Estates of Württemberg, although, as other monarchs found too, this could be quite difficult to do.

The effectiveness of Württemberg's power was of course highly limited. It was a small state, and could aspire to only relatively modest ambitions – chiefly preserving its effective independence from the emperor. This at least it was able to do: its rulers, promoted to kings of Württemberg in 1806, only finally disappeared from the European scene in 1918.

Summary

In conclusion, therefore, all of this added up to a very considerable increase in the power of monarchs and their governments. The authority of many monarchs reached its apogee late in the early modern period. As you saw in Chapter 17 as well as here, however, monarchs' power was by no means total, and many of the claims of 'absolute' monarchs far exceeded what they could actually achieve in practice. Their control over the lives of their subjects in far-off provinces was inevitably limited, by practical problems of distance and the forces of nature, as well as by shortages of money and technical ability. Furthermore there remained a high degree of corruption, nepotism, favouritism and sheer incompetence within these governments. Our verdict on the 'Age of Absolutism', then, is mixed.

18.3 Alternatives to absolute monarchy

Section 18.2 very much focused on the role of monarchs and their ministers, as they sought to increase their power and build their states. There were alternatives, however. This growth in the power of monarchs was by no means welcome to all their subjects, who had a natural desire to exercise control over their own lives. In some states, other forces within society resisted the monarch and retained constitutional structures in which the power of the monarch or the central state was relatively limited. As you read earlier, most states had some form of representative institution which gave an opportunity for other voices to be heard. These were not democratic in the modern sense, since only a small proportion of the population (usually well-off, propertied men) could participate in choosing the representatives. In some places, however, the representation of the commons was stronger: the Swedish Riksdag, unusually, contained a separate ‘house of peasants’, although even here only the more substantial free peasants chose the delegates (Roberts, 1968, p. 191). For all their shortcomings, these assemblies provided a degree of representation and allowed the concerns of a particular area or interest group to be voiced. This, of course, was why monarchs often sought to rule without them. Two examples where monarchical power was resisted, however, are the Netherlands and the British Isles in the seventeenth century.

Case study 3: The Netherlands in the seventeenth century

In the early modern period the ‘Netherlands’, or ‘Low Countries’, referred to the land now occupied by Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg. In the late Middle Ages this was a patchwork of small territories; these gradually came into the hands of one ruler, Charles of Habsburg, yet they were very definitely not a single state, but a composite state, in which each element owed separate allegiance to their monarch. It was as if Charles had acquired a number of different patches of land and now wished to make them one estate. The situation of the Netherlands was, in fact, also a microcosm of the Habsburg Empire as a whole. As a result of the intermarriage of European royalty, Charles came to be ruler of Austria, Spain, parts of modern-day Italy and France as well as the Netherlands, and he was

also elected Holy Roman Emperor as Charles V in 1519. Each part of the empire, however, retained its separate identity, and demanded to be treated as a separate unit. The Habsburg monarchs made considerable efforts to impose common institutions of government on the region, but these had only partial success.

Furthermore, from 1566 the Netherlands rebelled against Charles's successor as ruler of Spain and the Netherlands, Philip II (1527–1598, reigned 1556–98). Several of the factors which provoked the rebellion were reflections of the Habsburg unifying policy. One was an attempt to reorganise the church, the so-called 'New Bishoprics' plan. Another was the heavy demand for money for the defence of the Netherlands and (more controversially) other parts of the Habsburg Empire. The remoteness of the king, who remained based in Madrid, was also unhelpful, as was his stubborn refusal to accept any kind of toleration of Protestantism in the Netherlands. In effect we might say that the Habsburgs had pushed the Low Countries too far and provoked a hostile reaction: state formation was a difficult and lengthy process, which was not always successful.

Neither the rebels nor the king proved able to win a swift victory over the other, but neither side would concede defeat. The rebellion developed into a grindingly slow ground war which was only finally resolved in 1648, becoming known as the 'Eighty Years' War' or 'War of Dutch Independence'. The 1648 settlement recognised what had been the reality since the early stages of the conflict: it divided the region between the rebels' state in the north, which was Protestant and is referred to as the United Provinces of the Netherlands or the Dutch Republic, and the territories which remained loyal to Spain and Catholicism in the south. These were the predecessors of the modern states of the Netherlands and Belgium, respectively.

The United Provinces thus emerged as a rarity: a rebel state which had thrown off its monarch and become a **republic**. Yet it proved remarkably successful. Despite being a small territory, much of it low-lying and prone to flooding, it was able to take on the great powers of the age – Spain, France, England – and hold its own in war. Unlike these larger states, with their noble-dominated agricultural economies, the strength of the new state lay in its cities, its trade and therefore its merchants. An aristocracy remained, but it was largely excluded from power. Power lay primarily in the hands of the wealthy merchant oligarchies of the trading cities, above all Amsterdam.

The provinces of the new republic remained as hostile to centralisation as they always had been. The republic was highly decentralised: the individual provinces retained a good deal of autonomy, as did individual cities or regions within the provinces (Prak, 2005, pp. 168–73). The institutions of central government were minimal: ‘the Republic had no national legislation and no national judicial system ... Taxation was the responsibility of the provinces, whereas most other administrative matters were strictly a local affair’ (Prak, 2005, p. 173). Each province’s local estates (assembly) chose representatives to send to the States General to debate matters of foreign policy, peace and war (see Figure 18.6). Very little could be done without substantial agreement between the provinces, which each had one vote. Very often agreement was lacking and business was slow: provinces often disagreed or mistrusted each other, and delegates to the States General often had to return home for guidance from their provinces. The States General, although resembling a parliament, was unusual in having the independent status to decide its own business and times and places of meeting, which were frequent, often almost daily (Israel, 1995, p. 292). All provinces were in theory equal, but the province of Holland (by far the wealthiest) tended to have a dominant voice. Alongside all this, each province had a ‘stadtholder’, a kind of governor, who was usually a nobleman and often drawn from the House of Nassau, the family of William of Orange (1533–1584), the hero of the rebellion against Spain. Stadtholders served as important figureheads and often military leaders, despite the uncertainty over the precise extent of their power: ‘the entanglement of power was so murky and mystifying that even contemporaries asked themselves who was actually in charge’ (Prak, 2005, p. 179).

In effect, we can see all this as a particularly formalised manifestation of the need for compromise and negotiation within early modern states. Lacking the strong central direction of a monarch like Louis XIV, the United Provinces retained much of its localism. Like Louis, however, the republic spent huge sums on its army and navy: the former was essential to preserve its borders and the latter protected its trade. In many ways, the greatest factor holding this small nation together was the sheer necessity of unity in the face of powerful enemies. Under this system, the Dutch built unprecedented commercial prosperity.



Figure 18.6 Bartholomeus van Bassen and Anthonie Palamedesz, *The Ridderzaal of the Binnenhof during the Great Assembly of 1651*, c.1651, oil on panel and metal, 52 x 66 cm. Royal Picture Gallery, Mauritshuis, The Hague, Netherlands. Photo: Rijksmuseum.

Case study 4: The British Isles in the seventeenth century

The structures of authority in the United Provinces may have been tangled, but the mere existence of a clear structure of power was no absolute guarantee of stability in the early modern period, as the British Isles demonstrates very clearly. Here, the seventeenth century witnessed two revolutionary episodes which transformed the nature of power. The first of these was the conflict known as the English civil wars or the Wars of the Three Kingdoms.

Exercise 18.4

Turn to Bernard Capp, 'Revolution: England' in the set book and read pages 328–32. (You may have already read this section in your work on the chapter 'Gender' (Chapter 14) in Book 2.)

As you read, think about the following question:

- What does Capp suggest were the main causes and consequences of the revolt against the rule of Charles I?

This should take about 30 minutes.

Discussion

Capp notes that interpretations of this question have changed over the years – indeed, it is one of the most intensely debated historical questions of all. Capp stresses the importance of the question of money, particularly Charles I's need for taxes to repress rebellion in Scotland. Second, he highlights religion, which was both the cause of the rebellion in Scotland and a source of mistrust among Charles's English subjects. These combined, Capp argues, in a general mistrust of the king and his approach to rule, which made a restoration of cooperation between Charles and his Parliament very difficult and ultimately impossible. The short-term consequences included the victory of Parliament, the execution of Charles and the establishment of a republican government under Oliver Cromwell (1599–1658).

After Cromwell's death, however, the monarchy was restored in the person of Charles II (1630–1685, reigned 1660–85), with certain guarantees to ensure more effective cooperation between monarch and Parliament. These proved insufficient. As it happened, Charles II's successor, his brother James II (1633–1701, reigned 1685–88), was guilty of what Parliament regarded as one of the greatest possible sins: he was Catholic. During his short reign he extended a number of concessions to fellow Catholics and acted in a way which convinced many mainstream English Protestants that he was seeking to subvert the constitution, just as his father had done. In response, in 1688 a group of noblemen organised the second, much smoother *coup d'état* of the century by forcing James to abdicate and go into exile, and inviting James's Protestant daughter Mary (1662–1694) and son-in-law William III of Orange (1650–1702) to take the throne; they reigned jointly as Mary II (1689–94) and William III (1689–1702). This event is known as the 'Glorious Revolution'. To prevent a similar situation arising, they instituted certain guarantees, as set down in the Bill of Rights 1689.

Exercise 18.5

Turn to Reading 18.3, 'Extracts from the Bill of Rights, 1689', located at the end of the chapter. As you read, think about the following questions:

- What guarantees did the Bill of Rights lay down?
- To what extent should we see this as representing government which was accountable to the people?

This should take around 10 minutes.

Discussion

- The guarantees demanded by Parliament and accepted by William and Mary amounted to significant limitations on the power of the monarchy and strengthened Parliament. The monarchy became, in effect, accountable to Parliament and more tightly constrained by the law.
- Making government more accountable to Parliament is not precisely the same thing as making it accountable to the people, however, since Parliament was only partly democratic: the House of Lords was not elected at all, and the elites largely controlled election to the House of Commons.

Summary

In the Netherlands and Great Britain, therefore, there were significant restraints on rulers; both case studies underline the role of compromise and negotiation over power. Both countries took great pride in their status as non-absolutist states. The Glorious Revolution, in particular, became a totem of British 'freedom' and resistance to tyranny; in Figure 18.7 William III is depicted as a 'flourishing liberator', in contrast to the 'decrepit oppressor', Louis XIV.

Yet these differences mask several underlying similarities. The British and Dutch states that emerged resembled Louis XIV's France in that they were powerful military states which devoted huge amounts of money to warfare, vastly more than their predecessors 100 years before. To do this, they developed their ability to raise and manage money through taxes and loans, and to spend it on weapons of war. All three countries were also seeking to build colonial empires and expand their foreign trade. The Netherlands and Britain were not democratic states, but essentially bourgeois or aristocratic states:

dominated not by single monarchs, as in France, but by their elites. A comparable state was Poland, where the monarchy was elective: the king was elected by the nobility and had strictly limited powers. In all of these states, whether 'absolutist' or not, the mass of the population had very little voice in affairs, although it could be said that the principle of limited monarchy paved the way for more genuinely representative democracy later on.



Figure 18.7 Medal, 1691, silver, diameter 52 mm. Louis XIV (on the obverse) and William III (on the reverse) are both depicted as Roman emperors. British Museum, London, UK. Photo: © The Trustees of the British Museum.

18.4 State formation: the view from below

We have looked at some of the high-level developments in government and the structures of the state which occurred in the early modern period. As you have seen, many of these turned ultimately on the question of precisely how much power would be wielded by different segments of the elites: they were struggles, in effect, between the monarchy and the nobility, gentry or merchant oligarchy. What, though, did all this mean to the mass of ordinary people? We need now to look at how the developing nature of the state affected them. This section, therefore, looks at the state from below, from the point of view of people of low status. It looks at what the state did for such people, and how they interacted with it. This also reflects the greater interest historians have recently taken in the political life of those below the level of the elites.

The governance of the localities

To begin this section, let's first think about how very local communities were governed in this period. You can do this by thinking back to what you've already learned about the governance of one kind of local community: the town.

Exercise 18.6

Look back at the section on governance in the chapter 'Urban communities' (Chapter 10) in Book 2. As you do so, think about the following question:

- How would you characterise early modern town governance?

This should take around 20 minutes.

Discussion

Most early modern towns were largely governed by townsmen rather than by outsiders. The precise structure of government and how officials were appointed varied from place to place, but, in general, the town was ruled by the wealthier inhabitants – that is, those who were powerful in

that community. However, many other people from different social levels played a role in town government in one way or another.

During the early modern period, many towns invested in town halls to serve as headquarters of their local government, as well as expressions of their civic pride. The building shown in Figure 18.8 (now known as Abingdon County Hall and home to a museum) is one of the finest seventeenth-century examples in England.

This model of governance was in many ways reflected in rural communities, which were of course where the vast majority of people lived. Just like towns, rural communities were subject to the control of higher authorities, including the monarchy or, often, local nobles. In many parts of Europe, as you read in Chapter 7, noble landowners had a great deal of power over large parts of the country. In practice, however, monarchs and nobles had neither the ability nor the desire to involve themselves in the mundane, day-to-day governance of these communities.

In practical terms, therefore, most local communities had a considerable measure of self-government. Most of the time, everyday decisions about matters which affected the community were taken locally; these included local economic matters, such as how farming should be organised, or how vulnerable individuals should be cared for. As you saw in the chapter ‘The Reformation and local communities’ (Chapter 13) in Book 2, ordinary people in villages like Morebath in Devon also played an important role in the religious life of the community. Provided that they mostly obeyed the law and paid their rents and taxes, communities were largely left alone. This phenomenon is sometimes referred to in the English context as ‘self-government at the king’s command’: the local community managed its own affairs unless a more powerful individual chose to become involved (Collinson, 2003, p. 33).

Online session 18.2

Now go to the module website and complete online session 18.2. This should take around 3 hours.



Figure 18.8 Abingdon County Hall, Market Place, Abingdon-on-Thames, Oxfordshire, UK. Photo: © Greg Balfour Evans / Alamy Stock Photo.

Local communities and the state

Thus far in this chapter, you have seen how monarchs sought to develop their own power, and how ordinary people (particularly local elites) themselves played a role in governing their own communities. In some ways, these two processes went on largely separately; even men who were powerful in their local community had relatively little say in

the broader political community of the nation, and may not even have been able to vote in parliamentary elections.

Exercise 18.7

Turn to Steve Hindle and Beat Kümin, 'Centre and periphery' in the set book and read pages 298–306.

As you read, make notes on the ways in which ordinary people could participate in political life or decision making.

This should take around an hour.

Discussion

Some of the points made by Hindle and Kümin echo what you have already read, for example the role of ordinary people in running their communities, choosing local offices or participating in manorial courts, and their relationship with their landlords. Others relate more to how they dealt with more powerful people. In many areas, for instance, peasants or townsmen were represented in representative assemblies. They could be linked to wider structures of power through patronage networks, or could petition those in power to ask for redress. They could also use the law courts to enforce their rights.

These functions often included people of relatively low social status, and thus seem quite inclusive, but we should also recognise the limits to this. Participation was usually limited to married male householders, thus excluding women, the young and the very poor.

As you know, monarchs were seeking to strengthen their power in this period, and one of the ways they did this was by making use of local forms of government for their own purposes, thus connecting national and local government. As the set book puts it, 'early modern states gradually appropriated these local institutions to their own ends' (Kümin, 2014, p. 301).

One example of this is the role of the nobility. As you read in Chapter 7, nobles (from the wealthy magnates to minor local nobles such as Gilles de Gouberville) usually played a part in governing the regions where they were powerful. Their socio-economic power gave them political power, and this was utilised by monarchs: who better to

serve as the governor of a province or county than a man who had wealth and status there already?

In England, from the sixteenth century onwards, nobles were used as lord lieutenants (who were in charge of the militia), while the gentry served as justices of the peace (JPs), dispensing justice and implementing laws passed by Parliament. These roles helped to link the central state to local communities: the office-holders had a royal commission, but also depended on their local power, respect and knowledge to do their jobs effectively. Over the early modern period, JPs were given ever more extensive powers and duties in different aspects of government. We can interpret this process, then, as the state making increasing use of the elites to impose their wills on the localities.

Similarly, the state made use of even more local officials. As you've seen in online session 18.2, each village had two village constables, who were chosen from among the more substantial local citizens. They had important duties in the field of criminal justice and were often used to collect taxes or raise troops. After the introduction of the Poor Law, similar sorts of people served as overseers of the poor. These men were therefore being moulded into a structure of officials, with orders coming from the centre being directed to JPs and thence passed on to constables, who delivered the demands of the state to the front doors of peasant households.

JPs and constables worked without pay and without formal training, but were motivated (at least in part) by the need to play their part in preserving local order; as property-owners, after all, they had vested interests in restraining crime. In addition, the power they were handed by the central state increased their local status, and gave them opportunities to dispense patronage. The local desire to actively police local society met with the demand to build states from above: the two processes reinforced each other. On this very local level, therefore, there was a good deal of cooperation and consent between central government and local elites, who collaborated with the development of the state (albeit the poorest and least powerful may have been largely excluded from these relationships). One of the factors which encouraged state formation was that it often came with a local face, which helped make the demands of the centre more palatable. These apparently low-level interactions in the village were in fact crucial to effective state formation, for it was the multiplication of these which made the power of the central state a reality on the ground.



Figure 18.9 Jacques Callot, *The Razing of a Village*, 1633, engraving, plate 7 from 'The Miseries and Misfortunes of War'. Deutsches Historisches Museum, Berlin, Germany. Photo: © DHM / Bridgeman Images. This is one of a famous series of engravings that depicted the impact of war, in particular the Thirty Years' War (1618–48), which was typical of the ever-longer and larger-scale wars which early modern states waged.

These developments in local government were also used by central government to impose their growing demands on local communities. As you read earlier in this chapter, warfare expanded enormously in scale during this time. At the start of the period, when in 1494 Charles VIII of France (1470–1498, reigned 1483–98) invaded Italy, his army of 18,000 was considered very large. By the 1710s, Louis XIV had 310,000 men in arms (Tallett, 1992, p. 6). As the scale of warfare increased, it came to impact on the lives of ordinary people more and more. Many young men were recruited (often unwillingly) into the army or navy. The lives of ordinary people might be devastated if an army passed by their village; armies were often undisciplined, or simply 'lived off the land', looting food, fuel, horses and valuables as they went (see Figure 18.9). Finally, the population as a whole had to bear an ever-increasing tax burden to fund all of this. To take England as an example, at the start of our period wartime taxation took no more than 4 per cent of the total national income per year; by the end, it was nearly 20 per cent (O'Brien and Hunt, 1993, p. 159).

As viewed from the front door of a peasant's house, therefore, the state had both benevolent and destructive aspects. It guaranteed a fairly good level of social order, securing the safety of ordinary people and their ability to pursue their economic lives. It might also defend them

from external aggressors, or provide them with poor relief. If the local landlord was capriciously unjust, they could petition the government or go to the king's courts to plead their case, although there was certainly no guarantee of success. Of course many felt a genuine sense of allegiance to their monarch and a loyalty to the state, as you saw in Chapter 16. But at the same time, government could be cruel: it laid an often heavy burden of taxation on the family, took its sons for military service, perhaps restricted its religious freedom, and preserved the massive economic inequalities of early modern society.

Conclusion

In this chapter you have examined various aspects of the early modern state: as a possession and tool of its God-given ruler, and as a structure for serving the good of its people. As you have also seen, both of these tendencies prompted the growth, development and elaboration of government in this period, leading to the state affecting people's lives much more noticeably. This process involved some centralisation but also a great deal of remaining localisation. There were elements of both coercion and cooperation, enthusiasm and resistance in this process, and there were inbuilt unresolved tensions between them, not least regarding who had the ultimate say in matters, whose word was final.

Furthermore, the general trend towards stronger monarchies was not purely the creation of the monarchs themselves. Perhaps unsurprisingly, many periods in which the monarchy was strengthened followed periods of disorder or civil war: the rule of the Tudors in England followed the disruption of the Wars of the Roses; the rule of Louis XIV in France was preceded by the Fronde and the late sixteenth-century Wars of Religion. This surely suggests that strong kingship arose at least partly in response to a widespread desire for greater social order.

We should clearly avoid taking too rosy a view of the situation. Early modern states were unequal, and in some ways the poor were discriminated against by laws and privileges held by the nobility and the church. One can argue that the central function of states, maintaining social order, was simply a way of preserving the possessions of the wealthy. Regardless of how one views the process, however, early modern states were becoming more elaborate and intruded into people's lives more powerfully.

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Readings

Reading 18.1 Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet, Bishop of Meaux, on the nature of absolute kingship, 1678

Source: Mallia-Milanes, V. (1986) *Louis XIV and France*, Basingstoke, Macmillan, pp. 8–9.

[p. 9]

[R]oyal authority is sacred ... paternal ... absolute ... subject to reason. ... God establishes kings as His ministers and reigns over people through them. ... Therefore princes act as ministers of God and as His lieutenants on earth. It is through them that He exercises His empire. ... The person of the king is sacred. ... God has had them anointed by His prophets with a sacred ointment, as He has had His pontiffs and His altars anointed. But even before being in fact anointed, they are sacred by virtue of their task, as representatives of His divine majesty, delegated by His providence to execute his design. ...

Religion and conscience demand that we obey the prince. ... Even if kings fail in [their] duty, their charge and their ministry must be respected. For Scriptures tell us: 'Obey your masters, not only those who are mild and good, but also those who are peevish and unjust.' Thus there is something religious in the respect which one renders the prince. Service to God and respect for kings are one thing. ...

The prince need render account to no one for what he orders. ... When the prince has judged there is no other judgement.

Reading 18.2 Louis XIV on taking up personal rule, 10 March 1661

Source: Mallia-Milanes, V. (1986) *Louis XIV and France*, Basingstoke, Macmillan, p. 8.

Monsieur [Chancellor], I have called you, together with my secretaries and ministers of state, to tell you that up to this moment I have been pleased to entrust the government of my affairs to the late Cardinal. It is now time that I govern them myself. You will assist me with your counsels, when I ask for them. Outside of the regular business of justice, which I do not intend to change, Monsieur the Chancellor, I request and order you to seal no orders except by my command, or after having discussed them with me, or at least not unless a secretary

brings them to you on my part. And you, Messieurs, my secretaries of state, I order you not to sign anything, not even a passport ... without my command; to render account to me personally each day and to favour no one. ... And you, Monsieur the Superintendent [of finances] I have explained to you my wishes; I request you to use M. Colbert whom the late Cardinal [Mazarin] has recommended to me.

Reading 18.3 Extracts from the Bill of Rights, 1689

Source: Bill of Rights (1688), The National Archives (www.legislation.gov.uk).

[T]he said Lords Spiritual and Temporal and Commons [i.e. Parliament] ... for the vindicating and asserting their ancient rights and liberties declare

That the pretended power of suspending of laws or the execution of laws by regal authority without consent of Parliament is illegal.

That the pretended power of dispensing with laws or the execution of laws by regal authority as it hath been assumed and exercised of late is illegal.

That the commission for erecting the late Court of Commissioners for Ecclesiastical Causes and all other commissions and courts of like nature, are illegal and pernicious.

That levying money for or to the use of the Crown by pretence of prerogative without grant of Parliament for longer time or in other manner than the same is or shall be granted is illegal.

That it is the right of the subjects to petition the king and all commitments and prosecutions for such petitioning are illegal.

That the raising or keeping a standing army within the kingdom in time of peace unless it be with consent of Parliament, is against law.

That the subjects which are Protestants may have arms for their defence suitable to their conditions and as allowed by law.

That election of members of Parliament ought to be free.

That the freedom of speech and debates or proceedings in Parliament ought not to be impeached or questioned in any court or place out of Parliament.

That excessive bail ought not to be required nor excessive fines imposed nor cruel and unusual punishments inflicted.

That jurors ought to be duly impanelled and returned, and jurors which pass upon men in trials for high treason ought to be freeholders;

That all grants and promises of fines and forfeitures of particular persons before conviction are illegal and void.

And that for redress of all grievances and for the amending strengthening and preserving of the laws Parliaments ought to be held frequently.

And they do claim demand and insist upon all and singular the premises as their undoubted rights and liberties.

Chapter 19 Religious conflict, emigration and coexistence

Ole Peter Grell

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Learning outcomes

By the end of this chapter you should be able to:

- understand the significance of religious conflict for emigration and coexistence in early modern Europe
- understand the limitations and purpose of early modern toleration
- appreciate the need for and limitations of coexistence in different parts of early modern Europe.

Introduction

As you have seen in Books 1 and 2, the Reformation resulted in a split in western Christianity between Protestants and Catholics, but it quickly led to further divisions within the Protestant camp in particular. Initially, it had been unproblematic for Protestants to identify with and agree on what needed to be changed and reformed within the Catholic Church; creating their own Protestant churches proved far more challenging and led to disagreement and conflict.

First a variety of Baptist or Anabaptist factions came into existence, radicalising and politicising the ideas for reform that Martin Luther (1483–1546) had put forward. Gradually, Ulrich Zwingli (1484–1531) and the Swiss reformers found themselves at odds with Luther and his supporters – the split which would develop into the Lutheran and the Reformed movements was emerging. By the second half of the sixteenth century John Calvin (1509–1564), an exiled Frenchman who had settled in Geneva in 1541, had become the most prominent Protestant leader (Figure 19.1). Together with Heinrich Bullinger (1504–1575), who had succeeded Zwingli in Zurich, Calvin provided new and dynamic leadership to the Reformation. It is noteworthy that it was this Reformed, or Calvinist, branch of Protestantism which provided the overwhelming religious rationale and inspiration on the Protestant side in the religious wars which followed, confronted as it was with a revived and increasingly militant Catholicism.

The Reformation resulted in a series of religiously motivated conflicts and wars across Europe. First, German peasants claimed evangelical and scriptural justification for their rebellions in 1524–25, known as the Peasants' War. Its effect on southern Germany in particular proved significant and the loss of life in this short period has been estimated at between 70,000 and 100,000 people. Later, in 1534, the Anabaptist uprising and takeover of the city of Münster caused widespread alarm across Europe among both Protestant and Catholic rulers and religious leaders. Then followed two major conflicts between Catholics and Protestants in Germany: the so-called Schmalkaldic Wars in the late 1540s and early 1550s. Hardly had peace been secured in Augsburg in 1555 before a series of major conflicts which lasted for nearly 80



Figure 19.1 Unknown artist, *John Calvin*. Photo: Meeter Center, Calvin College.

years began in France, between an influential Reformed minority and the Catholic majority. The French Wars of Religion (1562–98 and 1610–29) were closely followed by the Dutch Revolt against their Spanish Habsburg rulers, which proved of similarly long duration (1566–1648), a rebellion largely motivated and driven by Dutch Calvinists fighting their Spanish Catholic rulers. These conflicts eventually concluded with the Thirty Years' War in Germany (1618–48), which was largely religiously driven and motivated and led to the

intervention of a number of European powers, and the civil wars in Britain (1642–49), which were similarly motivated by religion.

For the first time many rulers and states in Europe, for whom the ideal remained one state with one religion, had to find a solution to the problem of either accommodating more than one religion within their borders or purging their realm of religious **Dissenters**. In this context you should bear in mind that when some sort of religious toleration was granted in this period it was without exception of a temporary nature, a political and religious measure introduced to secure peace and concord until a comprehensive religious solution could be found which would once more create unity within one church.

Most of these wars and the religious persecutions associated with them resulted in mass emigration. Religious minorities were driven to seek either temporary or permanent refuge abroad. It has been estimated that between 1567, following the start of the Dutch Revolt the previous year, and the fall of Antwerp to Spanish forces in 1585, more than 200,000 Protestants fled the southern Netherlands. They were joined by more than 50,000 French Calvinists who left France during the Wars of Religion in the late sixteenth century. Most of these exiles settled in the United Provinces, some of the German principalities, and England. The 'Thirty Years' War also displaced tens of thousands of Protestants, especially from Bohemia and the two German Palatinates, mainly within Germany, Poland and the United Provinces; while the Catholic Counter-Reformation forced around 100,000 Protestants to leave Austria for Hungary and southern Germany during the second half of the sixteenth century.

This chapter explores religious conflicts, tolerance and ways of coexistence. We begin with the Holy Roman Empire and the attempts made to accommodate Lutheranism. We then take a detailed look at the religious clashes which engulfed France from 1562 to 1685, including the repeated attempts by the kingdom's rulers to facilitate some form of coexistence between a Protestant minority and a Catholic majority, and the resulting Protestant emigration. Next we consider the Act of Toleration in England and seek to determine what it meant in practice. Finally we return to Germany, looking at how some sort of coexistence worked in the Lutheran imperial city of Nuremberg.

Exercise 19.1

For background information about the growing religious and political divisions within Germany and France, turn to Henry J. Cohn, 'The long Reformation: Lutheran' and Penny Roberts, 'The long Reformation: Reformed' in the set book and read pages 107–21.

Then, to get an overview of the factors that impacted on religious conflict, toleration and coexistence, turn to Peter Marshall, 'Religious culture in early modern Europe' in the set book and read the section on 'Pluralism and toleration' on pages 137–41.

This should take around 30 minutes.

There is no discussion for this exercise.

19.1 The Holy Roman Empire (Germany)

The Diet of Augsburg in 1530, held in the presence of Emperor Charles V (1500–1558, reigned 1519–56), was called in order to recreate religious unity within the Holy Roman Empire. In this it failed. Instead it served to create two Protestant confessions: the Lutheran Augsburg Confession and the Confessio Tetrapolitana (or ‘four-city confession’), which covered Strasbourg, Konstanz, Memmingen and Lindau and was put together by the Strasbourg reformers Martin Bucer (1491–1551) and Wolfgang Capito (c.1478–1541). Both were rejected by the emperor and the Diet. The Protestants were ordered to suppress their heresy and return to the Catholic Church by April 1531. In response, the Protestant princes and estates within the empire established a defence league in the town of Schmalkalden – the Schmalkaldic League – which eventually adopted the Augsburg Confession. Open warfare between the emperor and his mainly, but not exclusively, Catholic supporters within the empire broke out in 1546, resulting in the First Schmalkaldic War of 1546–47 and later in the Second Schmalkaldic War in 1552 before peace was finally established by the Peace of Augsburg in 1555.

Online session 19.1

Now go to the module website and complete online session 19.1. This should take around 30 minutes.

The Peace of Augsburg determined the principle *cuius regio, eius religio* (literally, ‘whoever the king, his religion’), which meant that in the territories of princes and imperial knights the ruler had the authority to determine the religion of his subjects. It was a provisional agreement intended to fill the void until religious unity could be re-established by an ecumenical church council. Its principle was extended to include Calvinism in the wake of the conclusion of the Thirty Years’ War at the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, and remained imperial law for the next 250 or so years until the demise of the Holy Roman Empire in 1803/05.

19.2 France

Late sixteenth- and seventeenth-century French history can be understood only in the context of the country's religious split and the consequent fear and hatred between Calvinists and Catholics. This resulted in repeated outbreaks of civil war and a number of attempts to create the necessary conditions for a peaceful coexistence between the two religions.

Calvinism had spread rapidly in most urban centres and among the nobility in France during the 1550s and 1560s. In many cities Calvinists and Catholics clashed and in some, such as Lyon, militant Calvinist minorities attempted to force a Reformed church on their local community. The Peace of Saint-Germain in August 1570 concluded the third civil war between Catholics and Calvinists, or Huguenots as they became known in France. The peace left the Huguenot minority as a strong military and political force whose existence was not only legally guaranteed by the crown, but left the Reformed in possession of a number of fortified cities such as La Rochelle on the Atlantic coast. Charles IX (1550–1574, reigned 1560–74) had succeeded his brother as king of France ten years earlier, at the age of ten, under the regency of his mother, Catherine de Medici (1519–1589; see Figure 19.2), who followed a policy of compromise and peace between the two religious-political factions in the kingdom. By 1570 she was actively pursuing a marriage between her daughter, Marguerite of Valois (1553–1619; see Figure 19.3), and the Calvinist prince and Huguenot leader Henri, king of Navarre (1553–1610; see Figure 19.4). The queen mother wanted to create a political alliance within France between moderate Catholics and Huguenots, cemented by this marriage. Meanwhile, however, tensions between French Catholics and Huguenots were growing.

In Paris popular antagonism towards the Reformed was generated by a number of violently anti-Calvinist Catholic preachers such as Simon Vigor (c.1515–1575). In the months after the Peace of Saint-Germain Paris had witnessed several riots where Catholics and Huguenots had



Figure 19.2 Unknown artist, *Catherine de Medici, Queen of France, daughter of Lorenzo II de Medici*, 1559. Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, Austria. Photo: © akg-images / Erich Lessing.

clashed, with as many as 50 people killed (Diefendorf, 1991, pp. 152–8, 83–8). Similar incidents occurred in a number of provincial cities such as Rouen. Here an episode during Lent 1571 resulted in a violent confrontation when a couple of hundred Huguenots who were on their



Figure 19.3 After François Clouet, *Marguerite de Valois, Queen of France*, last third of sixteenth century, oil on canvas, 45 x 54 cm. Château de Blois Museum, France. Photo: © ACTIVE MUSEUM / Alamy.

way to Sunday service outside the city gates encountered a Catholic Corpus Christi procession led by a priest carrying the **Host**. The Catholics demanded that the Huguenots honour the Corpus Christi by kneeling; the Calvinists instead mocked the Host and the Catholics;



Figure 19.4 French School, *Henri of Navarre, King of France*, c.1575, oil on canvas, 61 x 51cm. Musée National du Château de Pau, France. Photo: © RMN-Grand Palais (Château de Pau) / René-Gabriel Ojéda.

and violence broke out. Initially the episode appeared to have passed without anyone getting seriously hurt, but later in the day the Catholics armed themselves and killed more than 40 Huguenots.

In other words, tensions between Catholics and Huguenots ran high well before the wedding between Marguerite and Henri of Navarre was announced early in 1572. The fact that one of the most prominent

Huguenot leaders, Admiral Gaspard de Coligny (1519–1572; see Figure 19.5), had been readmitted to the king's council in September 1571 and awarded a generous pension caused further alarm among Catholics in France, who saw his appointment and the planned royal wedding as evidence of growing and dangerous Huguenot influence on the king.



Figure 19.5 Marc Duval, *Gaspard de Coligny*, oil on panel. Musée Condé, Chantilly, France. Photo: © musée Condé / Bridgeman Images.

The St Bartholomew's Day Massacre, 1572

The royal wedding between the Catholic Marguerite de Valois and the Calvinist Henri of Navarre, which took place on 18 August 1572 in Paris, came to form the setting for the most ferocious explosion of public violence during the French Wars of Religion, in what became known as the St Bartholomew's Day Massacre. Rather than one incident, historians now consider 'the massacre' to consist of four interconnected events, starting with an assassination attempt on Coligny on 22 August in the capital, followed by the coordinated murders in the early hours of Sunday 24 August (St Bartholomew's Day) of dozens of Huguenot leaders gathered in the city for the wedding; this in turn set off a wave of popular killings of Huguenots in Paris over the next three days, which eventually spilled over into provincial massacres from late August until early October 1572, inspired by events in the capital.

Online session 19.2

Now go to the module website and complete online session 19.2. This should take around 30 minutes.

For obvious reasons it has been of paramount importance for historians of the French Wars of Religion to establish who was responsible for the killings. This has resulted in considerable controversy and some misunderstandings, not least because the surviving sources are either incomplete or biased – all of the main actors had good reason to lie in order to protect themselves and their reputations – and it is therefore unlikely that we will ever get a comprehensive understanding of who was responsible. In order to achieve the best understanding of these events it is important that the massacres are seen and analysed as a number of separate events rather than one (Sutherland, 1973, pp. 312–46).

The first event was the failed attempt on the life of Admiral Coligny on the morning of 22 August 1572. Coligny was shot in the arm and hand from a second-storey window in the capital while travelling back from a meeting with the king in the Louvre. As emphasised by historians such as Barbara Diefendorf, the significant aspect of this

event is that it failed and therefore unintentionally resulted in the events which followed (Diefendorf, 1991, pp. 206–10). Historians now agree that this was a conspiracy to kill Coligny and not just the first stage of a far more sinister and comprehensive plot. No agreement, however, exists about the identity of the chief conspirators. Until 1973 most historians considered the queen mother, Catherine de Medici, to have been the principal conspirator, supported by the Catholic Guise family. The revisionist interpretation proposed by N. M. Sutherland in 1973, arguing that the evidence implicating Catherine is unreliable, is now accepted by most historians. That she should have sought to have one of the most prominent Huguenots killed in Paris immediately after the wedding between her daughter and the Calvinist king of Navarre which she had spent so much political capital on bringing about makes no sense (Holt, 2005, pp. 834, especially note 13).

At some time during the following day – 23 August – a meeting of the king's council was called to discuss the growing religious and political tension in Paris in the wake of the attempt on Coligny's life. From what was discussed, it is clear that the council feared a Huguenot reprisal by troops encamped outside the city. Rumours circulated in Paris immediately after the assassination attempt that a massacre of Catholics was about to take place. The council, supported by the queen mother and the king, then opted for a pre-emptive strike against the Huguenot leaders still present in the capital. What they intended was a strike against around 40 Huguenot noblemen and their leader, Coligny. About 100 of the king's troops were ordered to carry out this action in the early hours of 24 August, while the city militia of Paris was ordered to guard the streets.

This pre-emptive strike succeeded in so far as most of the Huguenots targeted were killed, but their killing caused the religious fear and anxiety which had been building up among Catholics in Paris to explode into a popular groundswell of violence against Huguenots living in the capital.

Exercise 19.2

Turn to Reading 19.1, 'Extract from a letter from Filippo Cavriana to Secretary Concini, dated Paris, 27 August 1572', located at the end of the chapter. This letter was written by the Mantuan Catholic physician Filippo Cavriana (1536?–1606), who witnessed events in Paris.

As you read this, consider the following questions:

- How does Cavriana describe the events?
- What is his reaction?

This should take around 10 minutes.

Discussion

- These were clearly horrific events, with repeatedly stabbed naked corpses lying in the streets and floating in the River Seine. The perpetrators showed no mercy, murdering everyone suspected of being a Huguenot irrespective of their sex, age or status. Cavriana observes that many Huguenots refused to renounce their faith in order to save their lives.
 - Despite being a Catholic and deeply hostile to the Reformed faith, Cavriana appears to have been profoundly shocked by the events, pointing out that the normal jubilation among Catholics when Protestants suffered was absent here, because of the repulsive and distressing nature of the events.
-

This wholesale massacre of Protestants lasted for three days, aided and encouraged by prominent members of the city militia. The violence was extreme and barbaric: suspected Huguenots were slaughtered like animals, their properties were burned and many victims were thrown into the Seine to drown. What had been intended as a surgical strike against Huguenot nobles perceived to be hostile and dangerous to the crown had escalated out of control and turned into an orgy of popular violence. According to contemporary writers, over 1,000 corpses washed up on the banks of the reddened River Seine over the next few days and at least 2,000 Huguenots were killed in the capital (Figure 19.6).

Charles IX and his advisers, horrified by the massacre which they had inadvertently caused, made attempts to stop it. All the surviving sources imply that the popular bloodbath that occurred in Paris on St Bartholomew's night was spontaneous and not sanctioned by the king's council. Many leading Catholic noblemen personally intervened to prevent Huguenots from being murdered by offering them sanctuary in their homes (Holt, 2005, pp. 84–91).



Figure 19.6 François Dubois, *St Bartholomew's Day Massacre*, c.1572–84, oil on panel, 94 x 154 cm. Musée Cantonal des Beaux-Arts de Lausanne, Switzerland. Photo: © Musée Cantonal des Beaux-Arts de Lausanne / De Agostini Picture Library / G. Dagli Orti / Bridgeman Images.

The slaughter in Paris set off the fourth and final event of the massacre when the violence spread to the provinces over the next six weeks. Twelve cities witnessed massacres, including Bordeaux, Lyon, Bourges, Saumur, Rouen and Toulouse. These cities all had Catholic majorities, but were home to significant Protestant minorities who in several places had briefly taken control of their localities. They were cities where the two cultures of Catholicism and Calvinism presented a threat to each other. Everywhere the violence was conducted by locals, who were inspired by events in Paris; these cities experienced the same ritualistic murders of Huguenots, with corpses mutilated and burned. In Toulouse the local government did its best to follow central government orders to maintain peace and order and sought to protect the considerable local Protestant community. Initially it succeeded by imprisoning many of the local Protestant leaders for their own protection, but on 3 October crowds of Catholics stormed the jail and murdered the prisoners, including three Huguenot judges, one of whom was Jean de Coras (1515–1572), who had played such a prominent part in the Martin Guerre case, which you encountered in the chapter ‘A sense of self: individualism’ (Chapter 8) in Book 1 (Holt, 2005, pp. 90–3).

At least 5,000 Huguenots were killed in the massacres, although some historians believe that many more perished: perhaps 20,000, or even

more, may have lost their lives. Whatever the number killed, the St Bartholomew's Day Massacre proved a watershed for Calvinism in France, while achieving European notoriety among Protestants. Of those who survived, many emigrated to Geneva, the United Provinces and England, while others felt obliged to abjure their faith and return to the Catholic Church. The Huguenots' long-held hopes and aspirations for the full reformation of France were crushed (Holt, 2005, pp. 95–8).

The Edict of Nantes, 1598

In 1589 Henri of Navarre became the legitimate heir to the French throne, but because it could be held only by a Catholic his Protestantism proved an obstacle. This finally led him to abjure his Calvinism and convert to Catholicism in 1593 in order to take the throne. At the same time, he also wanted to end the religiously driven civil wars in France and restore the authority of the French monarchy. By doing so he demonstrated that he shared the aim of previous French kings, namely the maxim of 'one king, one faith and one law'.

Henri's conversion, however, did not result in the immediate backing for his quest for the crown from all French Catholics, or indeed Protestants. When he was crowned king of France in Chartres in February 1594, many leaders of the **Catholic League** still had to be won over – as well as a fair number of Huguenot chiefs, who felt uneasy about his change of religion. However, by the spring of that year, when the city of Paris finally opened its gates to Henri and acknowledged his claim to the throne, Catholics across France quickly fell into line and offered him their support.

Henri IV's participation in the Catholic ceremonies in the capital over Easter served to convince most of his Catholic subjects that his conversion was genuine. At the same time, his policy of appeasement towards the hardliners within the Catholic League gradually won them over. Simultaneously, however, his former Huguenot allies and friends grew increasingly worried. They were aware that the king's coronation oath obliged him to eliminate all heresy from Catholic France. Not surprisingly, the Huguenot assemblies which met between 1594 and 1597 turned increasingly militant, seeking improved legal guarantees for their assemblies and churches.

Henri's attempt to reach a negotiated settlement was helped by the general weariness with war and conflict among the population at large who had borne the brunt of the economic and social disruption caused by more than 30 years of civil war. Henri reached an accord with the Huguenots in April 1598, known as the Edict of Nantes. This consisted of no less than four separate documents: first, the official edict comprising 92 general articles; second, the additional 56 so-called 'secret articles', covering particular towns and individuals that were exempt from the general articles; and, finally, two royal *brevets* (temporary authorisations). Whereas the two sets of articles were registered in the *parlements* and intended as lasting laws, which could be cancelled or replaced only by other edicts, the royal *brevets* issued by the king were valid for just a limited time and would automatically expire on his death, if not before.

Online session 19.3

Now go to the module website and complete online session 19.3. This should take around 30 minutes.

The Edict of Nantes was intended as a temporary settlement which would allow for the religious coexistence of the Catholic majority with the Huguenot minority until the ultimate goal of religious unity could be achieved. Until then Henri IV guaranteed to protect the rights of the Reformed. The edict thus offered limited religious toleration. What it sought to achieve was a process which, through peace, would result in the restoration of 'one king, one faith and one law'. Despite the limits the edict placed on freedom of worship for the Reformed, many French Catholics still felt that too many concessions had been given to the Huguenots, and in February 1599 the *parlement* of Paris sent a delegation of judges to petition the king against the registration of the edict (Holt, 2005, p. 170).

The 56 secret articles consisted of a number of exceptions from, and additions to, the general articles, most favouring the Huguenots but others benefiting the Catholics. Articles 2 and 3 of the secret provisions excused Huguenots from making financial contributions towards the maintenance of Catholic churches and their clergy, and

towards expenses linked to Catholic feast days when citizens were supposed to pay for drapes and decorations of their house-fronts.

The most important concessions to the Reformed were, however, to be found in the two *brevets* issued by the king. Realising that the Catholic-controlled *parlements* would never consent to them, Henri IV chose to use his royal prerogative. First, the crown offered an annual subsidy to pay the salaries of Huguenot pastors: an initiative clearly aimed at balancing the fact that everyone was forced to pay tithes to the Catholic Church. Second, the *brevets* guaranteed the Huguenots a continuous military presence in France. They were allowed to maintain troops in no less than 200 fortified towns under their control, half of them defended by troops paid for by the crown, while the rest depended on local citizen militias. Thus, in order to appease the Huguenots and make them sign up to the edict, Henri IV was forced to make major military and political concessions, accepting for the time being that a Huguenot state within the state existed. The king, however, made it clear that such concessions were temporary and intended only to restore peace in France; thus the *brevets* were granted in the first instance for just eight years (Holt, 2005, pp. 166–75).

Exercise 19.3

Turn to Reading 19.2, 'Extract from the preamble to the Edict of Nantes, 1598', located at the end of the chapter.

After you have read this, answer the following question:

- What was Henri IV hoping the edict would achieve in terms of religion?

This should take around 10 minutes.

Discussion

Henri IV wanted to establish peace and concord in France. This he considered possible only through religious unity, which the edict was intended to bring about. The emphasis in the preamble was that it had 'not yet' pleased God to unite all French people in one religion – this future concord was what the edict, with God's help, would manage to establish in order that France would once more deserve the title of 'most Christian' nation.

The last wars of religion, 1610–1629

Henri IV was murdered by a Catholic zealot in 1610. Traditionally, historians have considered the murder to have been detrimental to the Huguenot cause: they date the gradual erosion of Huguenot rights and privileges to that event. This fails to take into consideration that Henri IV had only reluctantly renewed the *brevet* which guaranteed the Huguenots their fortified towns, while taking the opportunity to halve the annual subsidy from the crown, payments of which were by then already seriously in arrears.

After the only Huguenot member of the royal council, Maximilien de Béthune, Duke of Sully (1560–1641), resigned in 1611, concerns about the future for the Reformed religion in France heightened among the Huguenots. This anxiety caused the Huguenot assemblies to take an increasingly militant position towards the crown. When the young king, Louis XIII (1601–1643, reigned 1610–43), issued an Edict of Restitution in June 1617 demanding that all church property seized since 1569 should be returned to the Catholic Church, he found his policy opposed by the principality of Béarn, which was staunchly Reformed. After a military campaign, Louis XIII entered the Béarnese capital of Pau in October 1620, forcibly reintroducing Catholicism to the principality and causing deep anxiety among the Reformed in the rest of France.

Consequently, the Huguenots decided to strengthen their organisation and make military preparations. The Reformed assembly which met in La Rochelle in November 1620 divided Huguenot territory into eight areas, or ‘circles’, each with its own commander and troops who could not make peace with the king without the consent of the whole assembly. Louis XIII declared everyone involved in the assembly to be guilty of treason and initiated a siege of several Huguenot strongholds. Over the next two years a number of Huguenot towns and cities fell to the royal forces. The Peace of Montpellier, concluded on 19 October 1622, represented a comprehensive defeat for the Reformed. They had to give up the fortified towns which had surrendered to the king, leaving them with just half the original number, where they were allowed to keep garrisons only until a royal *brevet* ran out in 1625. Furthermore, Reformed political assemblies were unambiguously forbidden, contradicting the articles of the Edict of Nantes. The peace ended the situation where a state had existed within the state, and after 1625 of the 200 fortified cities and towns only La Rochelle remained.

Without the subsequent rebellions of La Rochelle the last war of religion might well have ended in 1622.

It fell to Armand-Jean du Plessis, Cardinal de Richelieu (1585–1642), who was appointed to the king's council in 1624, to finish off the Huguenots as a political and military force in a series of confrontations between 1625 and 1629.

Exercise 19.4

Turn to Reading 19.3, 'Extract from Richelieu's memorandum to Louis XIII, 25 November 1625', located at the end of the chapter.

After you have read this, answer the following questions:

- What was Richelieu's view of the Huguenots?
- How did he propose to deal with them?

This should take around 10 minutes.

Discussion

- Richelieu argued that the Huguenots had prevented Louis XIII from being in total control of his kingdom – from being 'absolute', as he put it. The Huguenot nobility in and around La Rochelle in particular represented a challenge to the king's authority. They might prove to be an enemy within, should Spain seek to invade France.
- Richelieu suggested a temporary truce with the Huguenots in La Rochelle in order for the king to deal with the danger of a Spanish invasion. The king could always deal with the Huguenots at a later date, unlike the Spaniards, who had to be dealt with now.

Richelieu's proposal resulted in Louis XIII agreeing a temporary truce with the Reformed in La Rochelle while the crown confronted Spanish forces in northern Italy. After yet another rebellion of the Huguenots in La Rochelle in 1627, a prolonged siege took place which decimated the population of the city – it lost half its population to starvation and disease before surrendering to royal forces in October 1628 (Figure 19.7). The Peace of Alais in June 1629 finally saw the



Figure 19.7 Claude Lorrain (Claude Gellée), *The Siege of La Rochelle by Louis XIII, October 1628*, c.1631, oil on canvas, 28 x 42 cm. Musée du Louvre, Paris, France. Photo: © Musée du Louvre / Bridgeman Images.

Huguenots submit to royal authority after Louis XIII had spent a decade seeking to suppress them.

It is noteworthy that although they lost the Wars of Religion, by 1629 the number of Huguenots in France had declined only slightly and remained significant in areas where they had long had a significant presence. The possibility of peaceful coexistence with the Catholic majority appears to have improved significantly in the seventeenth century compared with the previous century. The fact that the Reformed were no longer perceived as a threat by the Catholic majority undoubtedly contributed to what was in effect a peaceful coexistence.

The revocation of the Edict of Nantes, 1685

When Louis XIV (1638–1715, reigned 1643–1715; see Figure 19.8) came of age in 1661 and took over the reins of government he was instrumental in introducing a tougher approach to the Reformed, seeking to limit the number of places where they could enjoy freedom of worship. Consequently a number of Huguenot churches, or temples,



Figure 19.8 Rigaud Hyacinthe, *Louis XIV, King of France*, 1701, oil on canvas, 277 x 194 cm. Musée du Louvre, Paris, France. Photo: © RMN-Grand Palais (musée du Louvre) / Gérard Blot.

as they were known, were closed or torn down. New laws restricted Huguenot access to guilds and professions and prohibited Reformed communities from accepting Catholic converts, while funds were created for the conversion of the Reformed. All these initiatives had limited impact when compared with the so-called *dragonnades* which were introduced in 1681. This was a measure whereby royal dragoons were quartered with Reformed households, who had to bear the cost of this, unless and until they converted to Catholicism. The number of Huguenots had declined slowly during the seventeenth century, from more than 900,000 in around 1600 to roughly 700,000 when the first *dragonnades* were introduced. Surprisingly, Louis XIV's increased persecution of the Reformed from the start of his reign appears to have slowed this decline rather than accelerating it.

Despite, or perhaps because of, the lack of success of these initiatives Louis XIV decided to revoke the Edict of Nantes in October 1685.

Online session 19.4

Now go to the module website and complete online session 19.4. This should take around 30 minutes.

It has baffled historians why Louis XIV decided to revoke the Edict of Nantes. A campaign of intensified *dragonnades* had been introduced in the spring and summer of 1685 in most Huguenot areas, which had seen considerable numbers of the Reformed abjure their faith. Some historians have suggested that news of these conversions, which reached Paris in an exaggerated form, may have encouraged the king to try finally to rid his kingdom of the remaining Huguenots by forcing them to convert to Catholicism. That, together with the fact that France found itself at peace after decades of war with Spain, might have encouraged Louis XIV to try to obtain his ultimate goal of religious uniformity.

The initial feeling of triumph among the Catholic authorities, however, gradually gave way to apprehension when it turned out that the new converts were far from turning out to be the good Catholics hoped for. After the initial shock of the revocation many Huguenots quickly organised their personal affairs and fled France (see Figure 19.9). This clandestine emigration resulted in more than 200,000 Huguenots

leaving France, crossing the border into Switzerland or leaving by ship at night from isolated spots on the Atlantic coast (Benedict, 2002, pp. 373–4). This proved the largest religiously motivated emigration since the exodus of the Reformed from the southern Netherlands during the Dutch Revolt a century earlier.



Figure 19.9 Jan Luyken, *Flight of the Huguenots from France*, 1696, engraving, 29 x 36 cm. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, Netherlands, object nr. RP-P-OB-66.158. Photo: Rijksmuseum.

Most of these refugees settled in the Dutch Republic, England, Switzerland and parts of Germany such as Brandenburg-Prussia, Hesse-Cassel and the Palatinate. Smaller numbers travelled to North America and South Africa. The Huguenots consisted primarily of an educated elite of merchants and specialised craftsmen who proved of considerable economic value to the communities where they settled. Both Amsterdam and London in particular benefited economically and culturally from this influx of talented migrants.

The Huguenot diaspora was probably of greater ideological than economic consequence. Prominent French Reformed intellectuals and writers such as Pierre Bayle (1647–1706) were to provide much of the intellectual and philosophical input into the Enlightenment and the

emerging view of toleration as a positive virtue. Together with the Huguenot historian Elie Benoist (1640–1728), whose detailed *History of the Edict of Nantes* (1693–95) was simultaneously translated into both Dutch and English, documenting the injustices and persecution the Huguenots had faced in the years leading up to 1685, Bayle drew attention to the revocation of the Edict of Nantes as an example of the great evils of religious intolerance (Benedict, 2002, pp. 375–6).

The majority of Huguenots who had chosen to remain in France and who had converted in the wake of the revocation proved reluctant Catholics, avoiding Catholic services as much as possible while keeping their Reformed faith alive by worshipping within the family. Huguenots also began to gather for worship in isolated places served by itinerant preachers, as had often been the case in the first Reformed assemblies or congregations more than a century earlier. Between 1685 and 1687 around 720 Huguenot gatherings were broken up by the authorities, who arrested twelve preachers, five of whom were sentenced to death. This ‘church of the desert’, as it became known, kept the Reformed religion going in France until the lay preacher Antoine Court (1695–1760) started to provide some ecclesiastical structure by convening the first provincial synod of ‘the desert’ in the Cévenne in 1715. Gradually a proper Reformed church structure was put in place, with consistories regulating congregations and synods providing regional structure across France similar to what had existed prior to the revocation in 1685, except now, of course, people met in secret. Occasionally persecuted but more often than not quietly tolerated, this Reformed ‘church of the desert’ survived until the French Revolution in 1789 introduced religious toleration. By that time the Huguenot community had 500,000 members (Benedict, 2002, p. 377). If anything, the revocation of the Edict of Nantes appears to have sustained and reinvigorated these communities rather than killing them off as Louis XIV intended.

19.3 The Act of Toleration in England, 1689

Where France, as we have seen, experienced a period of prolonged religious conflict and warfare during the second half of the sixteenth century and the early seventeenth century, England would appear to have fared considerably better. Even so, this proved a time of deep political and religious instability there too. The Protestant Reformation introduced in 1534 by Henry VIII (1491–1547, reigned 1509–47) was further enhanced during the reign of his son, Edward VI (1537–1553, reigned 1547–53), but reversed during the reign of his daughter Mary I (1516–1558, reigned 1553–58), who was a Catholic. She was succeeded by her sister Elizabeth I (1533–1603, reigned 1558–1603), a Protestant, who once more reformed the Church of England. In what became known as the ‘Elizabethan Settlement’, Elizabeth I sought to create a church broad enough to satisfy most Protestants, but still faced opposition from Protestant Dissenters who wanted her to take the reformation further, and from a Catholic minority who wanted a return to the Catholic Church. The struggle for the shape and identity of the Church of England continued during the reigns of James I (1566–1525, reigned 1603–25) and Charles I (1600–1649, reigned 1625–49). Throughout this time English Catholics continued to be seen as a political and religious threat, a view reinforced by Catholic attacks on the country, first by the Spanish Armada in 1588 and then by the Gunpowder Plot of 1605. Religious disagreement was a major factor in the outbreak of the civil wars in 1642. Parliament’s attempt to move the Church of England in a more Calvinist direction failed, while disruption caused by the civil wars resulted in *de facto* toleration for all Protestant denominations, a situation which was authorised by Oliver Cromwell (1599–1658) during his rule as Lord Protector (1653–58).

In this tolerant atmosphere the Society of Friends, or Quakers, emerged under the leadership of George Fox (1624–1691). Its members rejected all ministers and church services. Instead they established meeting houses where all men and women could bear ‘witness to God’ when moved by the Holy Spirit. Within a decade there were more than 30,000 Quakers in England.

At the Restoration in 1660 Charles II (1630–1685, reigned 1660–85) promised to preserve religious toleration, but the new royalist Parliament was not amenable to this idea and instead passed, among other statutes, the Act of Uniformity of 1662, which reintroduced episcopal rule and the Elizabethan Church Settlement. This act ended the practical toleration of the previous decades, and all subjects were now obliged to attend services in their local parish church. Dissenters continued to meet clandestinely but were constantly harassed and imprisoned, especially the Quakers.

Charles II was succeeded by his Catholic brother James II (1633–1701, reigned 1685–88). The birth of James's son in 1688 threatened the return of the Church of England to Catholicism. Parliamentary and church leaders subsequently conspired with the Calvinist Stadtholder of the Netherlands, William III of Orange (1650–1702, reigned in England 1689–1702), James's nephew and son-in-law. This resulted in the coup known as the Glorious Revolution of 1688.

The Glorious Revolution offered an opportunity not only to widen the membership of the Church of England to a variety of Protestants, but also to extend toleration to those who wanted to remain separate, in other words Dissenters. Most Protestants expected to be granted some form of toleration in recognition of their support for the accession of William III and Mary II (1662–1694, reigned 1689–94). In contrast to their disappointment at the Restoration, this time they were rewarded by two bills, one of which, 'An Act for exempting Their Majesties' Protestant subjects, dissenting from the Church of England, from the penalties of certain laws', was passed and became known as the Act of Toleration (Figure 19.10).

Online session 19.5

Now go to the module website and complete online session 19.5. This should take around 35 minutes.

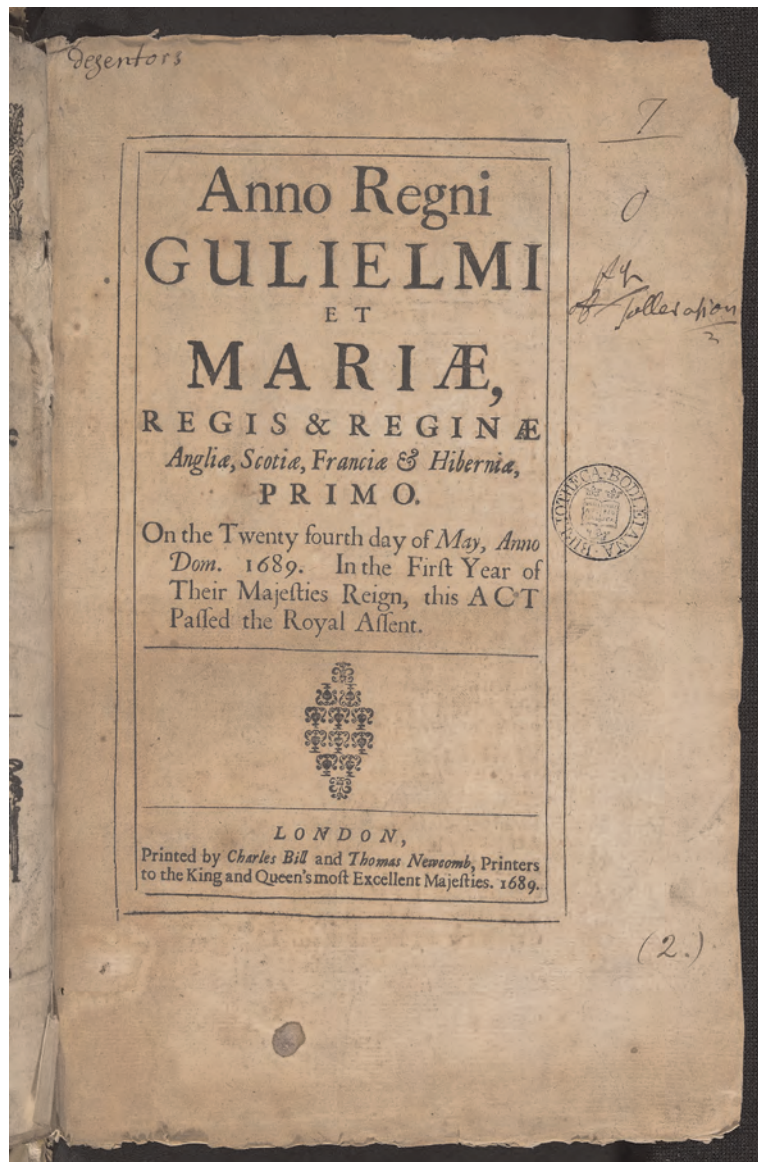


Figure 19.10 Frontispiece of the Act of Toleration (An Act for exempting Their Majesties' Protestant subjects, dissenting from the Church of England, from the penalties of certain laws), 1689. The Bodleian Libraries, The University of Oxford, shelfmark: fol. THETA 661 (2). Photo: Bodleian Libraries.

The Act of Toleration did not abolish any of the existing laws against Dissenters; it merely suspended the penalties imposed by some laws for the majority of Dissenters. Even then, Dissenters who benefited from the Act remained subject to the Test and Corporation Acts, which required all those who wanted to hold public office not only to swear allegiance to the monarch and recognise them as head of the church, but also to offer evidence of taking Holy Communion in the Church of England. If they did not, they remained excluded from political and municipal office. There were also statutes which continued to prevent them from attending university.

The Act granted only a limited and conditional toleration, which was probably as much as the Whigs and their 'low church' backers (this was the contemporary term for those who favoured Protestant rites) who championed comprehension and toleration were able to achieve politically at this point. By attending their Anglican parish church once a year and taking Communion, Dissenters were, however, able to make themselves eligible for municipal office. During the reign of William and Mary this limited toleration remained secure, but after the death of Mary in 1694, followed by that of William in 1702, Anne (1665–1714, reigned 1702–14), Mary's sister, became queen, and concern grew within Dissenting circles about the future of this practical toleration. By now the Tories and their 'high church' supporters (the contemporary term for those who wanted a strong episcopal church with an emphasis on traditional ritual), who had been opposed to the conspiracy of the Whigs and their low church backers, were in the ascendancy. No less than three bills against 'occasional conformity' were passed by Tory majorities in the House of Commons in the two years after William's death, only to be defeated in the House of Lords. Finally in 1711 a Tory government saw the fourth bill against occasional conformity passed. That the Dissenters had grounds for concern was proved three years later when the Tories got the Schism Act through Parliament. This measure was aimed at destroying the Dissenting academies which served as universities for those outside the Church of England. However, the Act did not achieve what its supporters had hoped for. With the death of Queen Anne in 1714 the Tories were out of power and the hopes of the high churchmen to further limit religious toleration were extinguished. Five years later, in 1719, the government reverted to the legal position which had existed under William and Mary, repealing both the Act against occasional conformity and the Schism Act.

In legal terms the limited concessions granted by the Act of Toleration remained in place unchanged until the Catholic Relief Act of 1778 made it possible for Catholics to take up public office. Repeated attempts by Quakers, Presbyterians, Baptists and Independent Dissenters to repeal the Test and Corporation Acts failed to achieve parliamentary consent. The reality on the ground, however, did not reflect the law. Many Dissenters who sought public office successfully used the device of occasional conformity to legally meet the necessary qualifications, while others simply relied on the indulgence or connivance of their fellow citizens to take up the local offices from which they were legally barred (Trevor-Roper, 1991, pp. 389–408).

19.4 Nuremberg: practical coexistence

The German imperial cities had been excluded from the *cuius regio, eius religio* clause of the Peace of Augsburg of 1555 and were allowed to pursue their traditional policy of peace and concord in the interest of trade and prosperity. Consequently a peaceful bi-confessionalism, allowing both Lutheranism and Catholicism, had developed in a number of imperial cities such as Ulm, Ravensburg and Augsburg. Even in purely Lutheran imperial cities such as Nuremberg and Frankfurt, adherents of other evangelical confessions were eventually tolerated. In fact the magistracies of both these cities actively encouraged exiled Calvinist merchants and craftsmen from the Netherlands to settle during the second half of the sixteenth century in order to enhance the economic and mercantile position of their cities. As long as they did not publicly question the cities' Lutheran Church Order and practised their Reformed religion quietly and privately in their homes these religious refugees were left in peace, not least because of their potential benefit to the cities' economy.

By 1567 Nuremberg was witnessing a considerable increase in the number of Reformed refugees arriving from the Netherlands as a consequence of the Dutch Revolt against Spain. Their arrival briefly undermined the religious equilibrium in the city, resulting in a number of disputations about religion. Many of these immigrants regularly attended Calvinist services in the neighbouring Upper Palatinate, where a Reformed Church Order was introduced in 1567. Some Nuremberg citizens brought this to the attention of their magistracy, who decided to identify these people, their number, their abode, and whether or not they formed what were described as heterodox conventicles (religious meetings) within the city. This was done chiefly to alleviate tender consciences among the native population and to preserve peace and concord. The magistracy eventually decided to intervene only against a few outspoken individuals who had been actively promoting the Reformed faith. They were ordered to accept the Lutheran Augsburg Confession or leave the city. It was decided not to take any measures against the Reformed community as a whole as long as its members practised their religion quietly and caused no offence. That the magistracy remained unconcerned can be seen from the fact that shortly afterwards it actively sought to attract more highly skilled immigrants from the Netherlands.

In the 1580s, however, complaints were made that members of the Dutch Reformed community were having their children baptised in the Upper Palatinate, rather than in their Lutheran parish churches in Nuremberg. Once more the magistracy went through the motions, instructing the immigrants to halt such visits. However, the Reformed settlers continued to undertake the three-day journey to Amberg in the Upper Palatinate in order to attend services and to have their children baptised. Clearly the magistracy in Nuremberg was prepared to ignore such activities, as long as they did not result in serious unease among its Lutheran citizens. Apart from the occasional complaint about the Reformed, which the magistracy sought to defuse by instigating surveys and investigations, little or no friction appears to have existed between the small Reformed community and the overwhelming Lutheran majority in Nuremberg. The insignificant number of the Reformed made it easier to tolerate or coexist with them, while the immigrants themselves showed some awareness of areas of potential conflict which had to be avoided (Grell, 2011, pp. 140–63).

This practice of attending services away from one's domicile, often known by its German name of *Auslauf* (running out), was one of the most common ways of making it possible for people of different faiths to coexist in this period. It was a form of ad hoc toleration in practice without in any way accepting the principle. It was extended to separate minority communities of different faiths, who were prepared to worship somewhere else, outside their city limits or across their territorial borders (Kaplan, 2007, pp. 161–71).

In 1611 *Auslauf* was made easier for the Reformed when Calvinist services were established in a castle only a few hours' travel from Nuremberg. Suddenly, the Reformed immigrants were able to attend Reformed services regularly without having to travel for days.

A decade later the size of the Reformed community in Nuremberg grew dramatically with the arrival of hundreds of Reformed ministers, schoolmasters and their families who had been expelled from the Upper Palatinate when it was occupied by Catholic forces as a result of the Thirty Years' War. Large numbers of Calvinists now regularly attended services outside Nuremberg, with the congregation numbering several hundred people. However, as the Thirty Years' War grew in intensity, the dangers presented by troops of marauding soldiers outside the walls of Nuremberg raised issues of security for the Reformed immigrants who wanted to attend these services and the journey was increasingly undertaken in armed convoys. This obviously

made the Nuremberg Calvinists far more visible, and the magistracy became increasingly concerned that these activities could prove dangerous to the city. The city might be accused of secretly supporting a confession not legally tolerated within the empire, which it was feared might be used to justify military intervention against the city by Emperor Ferdinand II (1578–1637, reigned 1619–37), especially after the publication of the Edict of Restitution in 1629, which banned all Protestant denominations other than Lutheranism from the empire. But when the magistracy finally intervened in December 1630 it was only to issue an instruction to the exiled Calvinist ministers and schoolmasters from the Upper Palatinate, telling them to attend their local Lutheran churches and not to visit other churches outside the city. Significantly, no attempt was made to impose similar restrictions on the city's wealthy Reformed Dutch and Walloon immigrants. They were in many cases already citizens of Nuremberg and their financial and commercial importance to the city was clearly seen as too important to be put at risk. To pick on the impoverished refugees from the Upper Palatinate was far easier. Furthermore, the Reformed services outside the city were considered more of a foreign policy problem than a serious local religious issue. Consequently there is no evidence that the magistracy ever attempted to enforce the instruction.

A few years later the Nuremberg magistracy grew concerned about the considerable charitable work for the exiles from the Upper Palatinate which was carried out within the city. The city fathers had at first provided some financial assistance for the Reformed refugees from the Upper Palatinate who arrived in the city during 1626 and 1627. By 1628, however, the political and religious climate within the empire had hardened considerably. The Nuremberg magistracy felt obliged to investigate whether some of its citizens were involved in creating an unauthorised poor box for the refugees from the Upper Palatinate with money collected abroad. Protestants, especially Calvinists, were increasingly finding themselves exposed to the religiously driven political initiatives of Emperor Ferdinand II's Counter-Reformation advisers. Accordingly, the investigation was not driven primarily by internal concerns, but rather by external worries about the possibility that the collections could be seen as indirect support by Nuremberg for the Calvinist cause. This in turn might expose Nuremberg to hostile actions from the emperor. The magistracy considered the outside threat to be serious enough to warn off the seven immigrant merchant directors of this charitable initiative, who were all prominent Nuremberg burghers, along with the leading representative of the

refugees from the Upper Palatinate. The seven were threatened with loss of their citizenship, while Dr Johan Heber from Amberg was told that his right of residence might be rescinded, if they did not bring their involvement to an end. Again nothing happened except that those involved in organising the relief took a much lower profile for a while.

Exercise 19.5

Turn to Reading 19.4, 'Extracts from letters written by Reformed refugees from the Upper Palatinate resident in and around Nuremberg', short extracts from seven letters sent by Reformed exiles from the Upper Palatinate residing in Nuremberg to their benefactors at the Dutch Reformed Church in London. This is located at the end of the chapter.

After you have read the extracts, answer the following question:

- What do these extracts tell us about how the Reformed refugees in and around Nuremberg viewed their situation between 1628 and 1631?

This should take around 15 minutes.

Discussion

Apart from having been persecuted by Catholics, the Reformed exiles initially felt neglected 'by their Lutheran neighbours'. By the beginning of 1629 their view of their Lutheran hosts in Nuremberg would appear to have plummeted. Not only did they have to beg their hosts for help, they also had to buy favours while at the same time being mocked and despised. Furthermore, the threat of an imperial edict banishing all the Reformed from the empire made their daily lives even more difficult. In order to preserve the goodwill of their Lutheran hosts they felt obliged to assist Lutherans in Nuremberg expelled from Bohemia and Austria, despite their limited resources. They were concerned that their inability to continue to assist these refugees might cause the authorities in Nuremberg to expel them. By August 1631 the exiles were complaining that they lived among those who hated them while having to bear their insults. Evidently the refugees from the Upper Palatinate felt that their situation had deteriorated dramatically within three years of their stay in Nuremberg – they had gone from being neglected and mocked to being hated.

Throughout the early 1630s the fear of expulsion and concern about the hostility within their Lutheran host population persisted among the refugees. They repeatedly emphasised that they had to live among those who hated them and that they were forced to bear injuries and suffer insults in silence. They also feared that the city magistracy might connive with the Habsburg emperor in forcing them to leave not only Nuremberg but the empire. Until the autumn of 1633 the Reformed refugees continued to claim that they suffered religious persecution, being reviled by the local Lutheran preachers in particular.

That these issues disappear from the correspondence of the Reformed refugees by the early 1630s would indicate that much of the difficulties may have been caused by the external religious and political pressure brought about by the victories of the Catholic forces supporting the emperor. With Sweden's successful intervention in the Thirty Years' War on the Protestant side, led by King Gustavus Adolphus (1594–1632, reigned 1611–32), this pressure evaporated (Grell, 2011, pp. 152–63).

Nuremberg never offered the Reformed more than freedom of conscience. This limited religious toleration was available as long as it did not endanger the peace and social and political order of the city. Peace and concord had been, and remained, the guiding principle for the city fathers in Nuremberg. Limited religious plurality only added another dimension to the issues they already had to consider. When members of the majority Lutheran citizenship felt offended or alarmed by the number of Reformed immigrants/refugees and their religious activities within and without the city, the magistracy stepped in to investigate. These investigations were more often than not carried out in order to alleviate local concerns and hardly ever resulted in direct intervention against the Reformed minority. Thus peaceful coexistence between a Lutheran majority and a much smaller immigrant Reformed minority survived the conflicts and fear generated by the Thirty Years' War.

Conclusion

You have seen how the religious split caused by the Reformation resulted in conflict, warfare, persecution and subsequent emigration for more than a century in Europe. Through the examples from Germany, France and England you have seen how states and cities sought to accommodate more than one religion. You have explored how they tried to facilitate some form of toleration or coexistence between not only Catholics and Protestants, but also between different Protestant denominations within their jurisdiction – or, in extreme cases such as France during the reign of Louis XIV, how they tried to rid their country of all adherents of the Reformed faith.

In particular you have seen how the religious conflict between Huguenots and French Catholics resulted in a variety of responses from the rulers of France, from the St Bartholomew's Day Massacre in 1572, via the Edict of Nantes in 1598, to the revocation of that edict in 1685.

You will also have understood that the ideal of religious toleration did not have many supporters in Europe before the end of the seventeenth century. You may wonder whether much had changed in terms of religious tolerance in the 130 or so years between the Peace of Augsburg in 1555 and the Act of Toleration in 1689. Think back to the three sources – the Peace of Augsburg, the Edict of Nantes and the Act of Toleration – which you have examined in detail and ask yourself what, if anything, changed in terms of religious toleration over that time. The limited tolerance granted the Huguenots in 1598 was significant, despite its limitations in terms of geography and time. It was without doubt a major concession in its day and would have been envied at the time by other Protestant and Catholic minorities across Europe. Even so it is worth comparing it with the religious toleration resulting from the Peace of Augsburg 43 years earlier. Unlike the limited tolerance granted to Dissenters in England almost 100 years later with the Act of Toleration, both were temporary measures. They were introduced to facilitate peace and concord in order to generate religious unity inside one church within the not too distant future. What the Act of Toleration offered was intended to last – although, importantly, this depended on Parliament not rescinding it – and therefore marks a step, albeit a partial one, towards the ideal of religious toleration.

That Louis XIV of France should have chosen the exact opposite move four years earlier, as you have seen in the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, remains baffling. Its rationale should probably be found in the king's belief in absolutism, while the Act of Toleration was a product of English parliamentarianism, which facilitated a limited move towards religious tolerance.

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Readings

Reading 19.1 Extract from a letter from Filippo Cavriana to Secretary Concini, dated 27 August 1572

Source: Quoted in Jouanna, A. (2013) *The Saint Bartholomew's Day Massacre: The Mysteries of a Crime of State* (trans. J. Bergin), Manchester, Manchester University Press, p. 2.

One saw only naked bodies pierced by a thousand stabs in the streets; the river transported just as many bodies. No distinction was made for sex, age or the status of people ... people fled through the streets, with others pursuing them and shouting, 'kill, kill', so that it was a real massacre. What should be underlined is the stubbornness of some people, both men and women, who' although they had a knife to their throats and the possibility of saving their lives by abjuring, nevertheless wished to become martyrs of the devil and so lose both their soul and their body because of their obstinate ignorance ...

We do not remark such joy and jubilation among Catholics that we were accustomed to previously, because the spectacle was truly horrible and pitiful. ... All of them [Catholics] wear the white cross in their hats, because when the feast-day was celebrated, people put a shirt-sleeve on their left arm. And the password was 'Long live God and the King', in order to recognise our people and distinguish them from the others.

Reading 19.2 Extract from the preamble to the Edict of Nantes, 1598

Source: Quoted in Mousnier, R. (1973) *The Assassination of Henry IV: The Tyrannicide Problem and the Consolidation of the French Absolute Monarchy in the Early Seventeenth Century*, London, Faber & Faber, p. 317.

But now that it hath pleased God to give us a beginning of enjoying some Rest, we think we cannot employ ourselves better, to apply to that which may tend to the glory and service of his holy name, and to provide that he may be adored and prayed unto by all our Subjects: and if it has not yet pleased him to permit it to be in one and same

form of Religion, that it may at least be with one and the same intention ... and that we and this Kingdom may always conserve the glorious title of most Christian, which hath been by so much merit so long since acquired

Reading 19.3 Extract from Richelieu's memorandum to Louis XIII, 25 November 1625

Source: Quoted in Holt, M. P. (2005) *The French Wars of Religion, 1562–1629*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, p. 184.

It is certain that as long as the Huguenot party subsists in France, the King will not be absolute in his kingdom, and he will not be able to establish the order and rule to which his conscience obliges him and which the necessity of his people requires. It is also necessary to destroy the pride of the great nobles, who regard La Rochelle as a citadel in whose shadow they can demonstrate their discontent with impunity. It is besides certain that no one will dare to undertake anything glorious abroad, no even to oppose foreign ambitions, because the Huguenot party will seek to profit from the situation, as it did in the last war ... [However,] prudence does not permit the undertaking of two wars at the same time. It is not known when the war in Italy will end. However, it would seem that one should settle the civil war, chiefly because the occasion to deal with the Huguenots will return, whereas if one loses the opportunity to deal with the foreigners' ambitions it will not be possible to do so again in a single attempt ... If we make peace within the kingdom, there is nothing to be feared if they [the Spanish] invade, and it is likely that they will not undertake this course of action. But if we are well embarked on the siege of La Rochelle, they would certainly do so with impunity, and in such circumstances we would have to abandon the siege¹⁶.

¹⁶ Memorandum of Richelieu to the King, 25 November 1625, in Bonney, 1988, pp. 7-8.

Reading 19.4 Extracts from letters written by Reformed refugees from the Upper Palatinate resident in and around Nuremberg

Source: Hessels, J. H. (ed.) (1897) *Ecclesiae Londino-Batavae*, vol. III, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

[1.] ... as the miserable exiles of the Palatinate deprived of everything, assailed by the Papists, neglected by their Lutheran neighbours, are relieved by foreigners.

[Extract from a letter to the administrators of the English collection for the refugees at the Dutch Reformed Church in London, England, 28 September 1628]

[2.] To aggravate our misery we have to seek refuge among those who differ from us in religion, and whose dangerous favour we must beseech and buy. And yet we do not escape mockery and calumny. We live moreover in fear of being expelled from the whole of the Empire, ...

[Extract from a letter to the administrators of the English collection for the refugees at the Dutch Reformed Church in London, England, 17 January 1629]

[3.] Several Lutherans expelled from Bohemia and Austria also request assistance from our collection, whom, in our present distress, we cannot help, though formerly when we had something to give, we could not send them empty away, lest their brethren among whom we are to live, should take this as a pretext for expelling us from our hiding-places.

[Extract from a letter to the administrators of the English collection for the refugees at the Dutch Reformed Church in London, England, 27 April 1629]

[4.] We have to live among those who hate us, and to bear injuries and insults silently; our former pupils will not help us with a farthing

or a loan; while no Papist officers will do us justice, or compel those who owe us money to pay us.

[Extract from a letter to the administrators of the English collection for the refugees at the Dutch Reformed Church in London, England 14 August 1631]

[5.] While thanking you for your help, we at the same time pray you to continue your benevolence, as it is to be feared that the papacy, with the connivance of our Evangelical authorities, will overwhelm everything, and compel those who resist it, to emigrate.

[Extract from a letter to the administrators of the English collection for the refugees at the Dutch Reformed Church in London, England, 14 August 1631]

[6.] Those who dwell in the suburbs of Nuremberg are oppressed by the auxiliary troops and other burdens, and by religious persecution.

[Extract from a letter to Samuel Harsnet, Archbishop of York, England, December 1631]

[7.] Among us there is great dearth, while the preachers revile the Orthodox religion more than ever. Hence our life here is nothing but misery.

[Extract from a letter to the administrators of the English collection for the refugees at the Dutch Reformed Church in London, England, 7 November 1633]

Chapter 20 Early modern Europe: a 'consumer revolution'?

Sara Pennell

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Learning outcomes

By the end of this chapter you should be able to:

- explain the meanings of consumption in early modern Europe and how they changed
- discuss some of the key features of the historiography of consumption
- identify useful sources for the further study and analysis of consumption practices
- evaluate whether the term ‘consumer revolution’ is historically useful.

Introduction

Up until now, this module has covered the structural aspects of early modern society – at the micro-level of household and family, to communal occupational organisation and the parish, and to macro-level institutional frameworks of the state, government, law and order. It has also explored many socio-cultural and socio-economic phenomena arising from these frameworks, such as poverty, crime, labour relations, and manifestations of faith and fidelity. In this chapter we turn to a topic which is embedded in most, if not all, of these areas of early modern life: consumption.

Consumption has become an important theme across several historical fields, from economic history to material culture studies. This is because it deals with a number of issues. For example, it covers quantitative issues for the economic historian, as a gauge of standards and costs of living. It also incorporates technological and design shifts, in the materials, making and marketing of new commodities. Cultural concerns are important here too, in terms of modes and practices of consumption, such as emulation (which we will return to later) and access to goods, through different retailing and marketing routes.

For historians of Renaissance and early modern Europe, this historiographical 'turn' to consumption has become a major preoccupation in the last 40 years. Scholars have argued that across some – but by no means all – parts of Europe from the fifteenth through to the eighteenth centuries, ideas about and expectations of standards of living changed, with resulting shifts in what and how people consumed. In Renaissance Italian cities of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the Low Countries in the seventeenth century, and Britain and France in the eighteenth century, a so-called 'consumer revolution' occurred (see McKendrick et al., 1982; Weatherill, 1988; Jardine, 1996; Roche, 2000 – and think back to the audio on 'Revolution' you listened to in your work on the chapter 'Broader horizons' (Chapter 17)). This 'revolution' is seen as both a function and a consequence of changing socio-economic organisation and challenges to existing ideological frameworks, some of which you have already encountered in the module: for example, the Reformation; the weakening of guild powers that formerly served to constrain unfettered trade; and changing conceptualisations of individual and group status. Consumption practices were crucially related to, and influenced by,

changing labour patterns, forms of production and productivity, and social organisation at the household, communal and institutional level. Historians have also focused on these changing consumption patterns as an especial feature of European societies in this period, playing a significant part in modernising certain regions and distinguishing early modern Europe's trajectory into modernity from other parts of the world (Trentmann, 2012, pp. 3–8).

This chapter will help you understand this historiography (and begin to think about some of its gaps), as well as helping you explore some of the sources for studying consumption and consumers in early modern Europe. It is intended to give you the tools to investigate how large-scale socio-economic changes registered at the individual, household and communal levels and how these changes may have made early modern people into 'consumers', while also questioning whether 'consumption' was the same for *all* early modern people in *all* locations and whether this was a phenomenon only of this particular time period, in Europe alone. In other words, you will be exploring the question of whether we can identify a consumer *revolution*.

20.1 Early modern meanings: consumption in flux

Before we begin our exploration of early modern consumption, we need to think about what is and was meant by the term 'consumption'. As with so many words, its meaning has changed over the centuries, as well as being used differently (sometimes confusingly so) by different scholars to mean different things. So take this opportunity to look up 'consumption' and 'consumer' in a dictionary of your choice and jot down the meanings.

If you looked up the words in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, you will find that 'consumer' – the very word used in the title of this chapter – was not in wide circulation until the late nineteenth century, when it assumed the meaning of a person with a conscious motivation to consume and someone who has and, as importantly, knows his or her rights as a consumer. In the light of this definition, we might wonder if we can even talk about early modern 'consumers' at all: but, for now, let us focus on 'consumption' and its uses.

Exercise 20.1

Read the following short extract and consider the following question:

- What difficulties does the author, Harm Nijboer, see in the use of the term 'consumption' by different disciplines?

This should take around 15 minutes.

Consumption is differently conceptualised within the social sciences. Many cultural theorists define consumption as the use of goods. ... Economists on the other hand tend to equate consumption with ... effective demand, household expenditure, utilization or the act of purchasing. In all these cases the word 'consumption' is used for acts or processes that can be referred to by other terms more precisely. However, there is one act that cannot be described by another term than consumption, namely, the *using up or wearing out* of a product. Consumption in this sense is a process that takes

place within a *consumption cycle* of choosing, acquiring, using and subsequent discarding of a commodity.

(Nijboer, 2005, p. 22; original emphasis)

Discussion

Nijboer points out that different social sciences have had differing views of consumption as a process, which are not necessarily compatible. He also argues that some of these uses of the term can be substituted by other terms (such as use of goods, or expenditure/purchase).

As Nijboer also suggests, for the sixteenth century at least, consumption was a moral phenomenon as much as it was an economic or a cultural one. In contemporary discourse consumption was represented as destructive and destabilising. It used up bodies and souls, households and estates, as Francis Trigge in *The True Catholique* (1602) declared: ‘This world also is a consumption, a destruction to all that do love it’ (Trigge, 1602, p. 478). From the hearth to the altar, commentators counselled against straying into the ways of excess; as Gervase Markham warned his readers in *The English Hus-Wife* (1615), ‘it is a rule if we extend to the uttermost we take away increase, if we go a hair breadth beyond we enter into consumption’ (Markham, 1615, p. 3, modernised).

Figure 20.1 reproduces a 1549 engraving by Heinrich Aldegrever (c.1501/2–c.1555/61), an emblematic representation that portrays the deadly sin *Luxuria* (lust) as a female who is not just bare-breasted and accompanied by a boar (symbol of excess), but is holding a long, dimpled-glass drinking vessel in one hand and an elaborate metalwork flagon in the other. Here luxury is not only equated with lust but also feminised *and* materialised in newly fashionable glass and plate.

Renaissance commentators believed lust and spiritual incontinence were the handmaidens of consumption, and luxury the fulfilment of sensual and material excess. These discussions joined humanist, and latterly Protestant and Counter-Reformation, theologies to classical ideals of stoicism (the idea of exercising restraint over one’s emotions, in order to achieve a higher state of well-being) to characterise conspicuous



Figure 20.1 Heinrich Aldegrever, *Luxuria*, 1549, engraving, 7 x 5 cm. British Museum, London, UK. Photo: © The Trustees of the British Museum.

consumption as a material, as well as a moral problem (Allerston, 2007, p. 16).

However, not all consumption was deemed inherently bad.

Conspicuous consumption by certain social groupings was both a social requirement and an expectation; indeed, at the apex of society material magnificence was a *sine qua non* (something that is absolutely essential). As writers like Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527) advised, a prince *had to* be more magnificent than his court and at least on a par with rival princes. In 1560 the papal ambassador to the king of Poland, Sigismund II (1520–1572, reigned 1548–72), wrote approvingly to his master of the Polish king’s equestrian kit: ‘The King owns thirty saddles and trappings of such splendour that it is impossible to see elsewhere more sumptuous; that some are made of pure gold and silver is not surprising *since they belong to a prince*’ (quoted in Jardine, 1996, p. 309; emphasis added). As you learned in both Chapter 17 and the chapter ‘States and people: the growth of governance in early modern Europe’ (Chapter 18), such show and display were important to monarchs and other elites wishing to assert their power. Those in ranks below were expected to observe limits to their consumption in accordance with their status, often enforced via **sumptuary legislation**, which was concerned with clothing, diet and even household furnishings. Yet, while such regulations were intended to ensure that differentiation between social groups was maintained and made visible, the very fact of their existence suggests such boundaries between social groups were less fixed, in material terms, than authorities could legislate for (Rublack, 2010, pp. 265–9).

Online session 20.1

Now go to the module website and complete online session 20.1. This should take around 30 minutes.

The other important feature of discourses around consumption, especially luxury consumption before 1700, was the fear of economic destabilisation. Luxury goods were often synonymous with *foreign* goods and their excessive consumption could irrevocably harm the balance of trade within a country and between states. This is what we would now call protectionism: acting to ensure such imbalances did not

occur, minimising the flow of currency overseas and focusing mainly on domestic production. This is what the English mercantile writer Thomas Mun (c.1571–1641) recommended in his posthumously published *England's Treasure by Forraign Trade* (1664): 'We may likewise diminish our importations, if we would soberly refrain from excessive consumption of forraign wares in our diet and raiment [clothing]' (Mun, 1664, p. 16).

But Mun was writing at a time when state powers to exercise firm control over the material appetites of their citizens were waning, even in centralised regimes like France. This was a consequence partly of expanding trade horizons, with the opening up of Far Eastern and New World routes to new commodities; but also of the wider exposure of increasingly mobile populations to changing fashions and tastes in material goods. As a consequence, arguments about the potential of unlimited consumption to *increase* trade, rather than destroy national wealth and well-being, found advocates for the first time.

The Dutch writer Bernard Mandeville (c.1670–1733), writing in English in his *Fable of the Bees* (1714), was one such advocate. He argued for the positive effects of 'private vices' (that is, tastes for the good things in life, as well as more illicit behaviours such as fraud) to produce public benefits: for example, through greater spending power, full employment and greater taxation revenues, as well as a balance of trade that accepts foreign importations as a healthy part of commerce. In the modern post-capitalist western world this seems an unremarkable observation, but in the early eighteenth century it was thoroughly radical. Little wonder, then, that Mandeville's writings were publicly condemned in London and France, where state and guild control over material production and consumption was highly orchestrated (Mandeville, 1970 [1714], pp. 11–14).

Although the negative connotations of luxury did not disappear entirely by the end of the eighteenth century, it was nevertheless more tolerated as a consequence of international trade, innovative manufacturing and social mobility. This shift – from luxury as sin, to luxury fuelling dynamic markets – is captured in another print, this time an English engraving from a 1773 publication, *The Passions Personify'd*. In *Luxury and Industry* (Figure 20.2), a family is depicted seated around a table in a modest but decently furnished parlour: all are neatly attired and the women of the family are busy with their lace-making. This is not a polite leisure pursuit for them, however. This is industrious household manufacture of just one luxury product, lace,

which has brought this family a degree of material comfort. Luxury consumption was no longer a canker at the heart of the community; it was a driver of commercial prosperity and power, as well as of taste, the badge of discernment and cultural belonging in the eighteenth century (Berg, 2005, pp. 31–7).



Figure 20.2 Johann Sebastian Müller, *Luxury and Industry*, 1773, etching, 9 x 10 cm. British Museum, London, UK. Photo: © The Trustees of the British Museum.

20.2 Sources for an early modern 'consumer revolution'

The prints and texts quoted in the previous section are partial, often ideologically very freighted, sources for studying the changing meanings of consumption in early modern Europe. Historians have also looked for evidence of other developments – whether consumption practices changed, and what dynamics were at work to fuel such change – using other, different sorts of evidence. Examples include surviving material culture (in museum collections, especially) and documents that record the ownership of goods by individuals (for example, inventories of chattels and legal cases), the retail and exchange of commodities (via newspaper advertisements, trade cards and directories), and the reconstitutions of domestic life and labour around and through changing consumption practices (in diaries, account books, correspondence and legal documents).

Perhaps the most widely used documentary tool for evaluating changing consumption practices is the inventory. An inventory was a list of goods owned by, or in the possession of, an individual or household at a particular point in the life cycle of that individual/household. These exist, in differing formats (and made for very different reasons), across European archives, for many communities and social levels within those communities. In England and Wales inventories were most commonly taken after someone had died, as part of the legal process of **grant of probate**, while in Italy inventories were taken at the point of marriage, or when a household was involved in a legal dispute or faced bankruptcy. Different types of inventory can tell us about the material culture of a household (Riello, 2013, pp. 135–40), and historians have used them to consider how domestic material culture changed both quantitatively and qualitatively across the early modern period (see, for example, Weatherill, 1988; Pardailhé-Galabrun, 1991; Overton et al., 2004; Ago, 2013).

Other documentary sources, some of which you have already encountered in the module, can also be revealing. Trade records, such as port books (the records of cargoes moving in and out of England on which taxes were charged), have been used to reveal shifting levels of commodity demand through changing types and quantities of imports and exports. Taxation data (for example, customs levied on imported goods, or on new goods and services) highlight how states

valued changing consuming behaviours as a revenue source. Church and criminal court cases, such as those which have been digitised for the London Old Bailey Sessions from 1674 that you came across in the chapter 'Popular action: ritual, protest and riot' (Chapter 16) in Book 2, can illuminate not only what people owned, but also what people wanted and how illicit markets in stolen goods could supply those wants at most levels of society. From the late seventeenth century onwards, newspapers and other print media supplied the column space for advertisements for all manner of consumables, from the so-called 'new groceries' (first spices, then sugar, tea, coffee, chocolate) to new fabrics, furniture and fashions that were becoming increasingly available and desirable.

Material survivals, either from archaeological deposits or in museum collections, can also give substance to documentary accounts of changing consumption; but they raise different questions too, especially when objects survive which do not have much or any presence in other documentation. The condition of surviving objects can also tell us about ideas of ownership and preservation: mended porcelain teapots compared with the countless shards of broken earthenware excavated from post-medieval cesspits tell us that someone thought repairing such a teapot worth the expense, while mending a plain red-glazed earthenware dish was not.

Yet museum artefacts can be difficult sources to 'read' as evidence of past consumption, as they often lack records of who owned them at the time they were first produced, and have been filtered through subsequent collecting processes. Archaeological deposits throw up different problems, not least because they are often only fragments, rather than complete objects; and only certain types of material survive in archaeological contexts. Nevertheless, it is through archaeological remains that we can often better access and quantify artefacts of consumption, such as tobacco pipes, than is possible via the single objects on display in museums.

As this brief survey of sources suggests, no one category alone can yield everything we wish to know or understand about early modern consumption. The historian must therefore bring together a range of sources, textual and material, to evaluate its extent and identify those who participated in and benefited from it.

Online session 20.2

Now go to the module website and complete online session 20.2. This should take around 40 minutes.

20.3 Consuming what?

Now that you have encountered some of the sources we can use to explore early modern consumption, we can consider what people consumed and whether what was consumed changed substantially over our period.

Although conspicuous consumption may have been episodic and event-driven (think of Renaissance feasts, or ambassadors giving gifts to the monarchs whose courts they served), most consumption is – and was – a daily activity: indeed, eating is perhaps the most direct and continuously practised form of consuming. So, for the purposes of this chapter, we need to distinguish between consumption to survive, and consumption that substantively changed the material environments *and* practices of early modern societies. Eating and drinking straddle these definitions, of course: new foodstuffs and beverages and their associated material cultures and ‘spaces of consumption’ dominate accounts of changing ‘consumer behaviour’ (Lorna Weatherill’s (1988) phrase) from the late medieval period onwards (Shammas, 1990, pp. 121–56).

Although a great deal of attention has been paid to the appearance in a wider range of eighteenth-century households of a core group of ‘new’ domestic goods – cutlery, decorative ceramics to both use at table and serve hot drinks, mirrors, cotton clothing and domestic linens, clocks, upholstered furniture – care needs to be taken to distinguish between absolutely new forms and materials (for example, a mahogany tea-table), and familiar goods being recast in novel materials.

The English bed-hangings illustrated in Figure 20.3, which date from the late seventeenth century, reveal a complicated material story of changing trade in, and desires for, ‘new’ commodities. Bed-curtains had, up to this period, been made out of luxury European fabrics, such as high-quality wools, velvets and silks. But new trading relationships with the Indian subcontinent brought embroidered, painted and printed Indian cottons (such as chintzes and pintados) to Europe. This set, made by an Englishwoman called Abigail Pett, shows the influence of this growing trade: she embroidered Asian-inspired designs mixed with more domesticated motifs on to English wool, to give the effect of imported cotton fabric.



Figure 20.3 Abigail Pett, bed-hangings, c.1680, embroidered in crewel wool on a linen and cotton ground, 198 x 102 cm. Victoria and Albert Museum, London, UK. Photo: © Victoria and Albert Museum.

In fact, shifting consumption practices in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were concerned in the main with what we might call material switching (pewter tablewares for wooden platters; window glass for wooden lattices; silk for wool), rather than expanding the type, form and number of goods owned. This was consumption of new materials, rather than new goods. Later seventeenth- and eighteenth-century consumption was, by contrast, shaped in great part through the arrival of truly new consumable commodities such as coffee and tea, generating new goods in novel materials, as well as new practices and places to engage with and deploy such objects – for example, the tea-table and the coffee house.

Giving attention to these material shifts is as important as studying new goods, for what something was made from could have significant practical and economic implications for non-elite households. The move from using what Carole Shammas terms ‘sturdy durables’ (such as hardwearing materials like wood, leather, wool) and those which carried intrinsic value (such as metalwares and precious stones), to what she calls ‘semi-durables’ (materials like ceramics, glass and cottons) in the making of many things, from drinking vessels to bed-curtains, signalled an early modern materials revolution (Shammas, 1990, pp. 76, 187). By simply switching from using pewter tablewares to decorated earthenwares, to take but one example, households were placing the *investment* tied up in the intrinsic value of the metal as secondary to the *decorative* values of the ceramics, which had little or no value once broken. This switch from material durability to less durable but decorative fashionability not only shaped what was seen as desirable, but also fuelled a diversification in production to meet such wants.

But changing consumption practices were not just driven by fashion, as the next section will explore: things that did not adorn the body or render the early modern household more comfortable are often overlooked in the roll call of ‘new’ consuming practices and goods. The coming of coal as a domestic fuel across northern Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was transformative, changing forever domestic heating and cooking patterns, as well as reconfiguring domestic architecture to accommodate brick chimneys (Pennell, 2012, pp. 71–3). Transport underwent its own ‘revolution’ as horse ownership became more widespread, while coaches were the ‘must-have’ accessory of any eighteenth-century European genteel family (or aspiring genteel family). As you have seen in Chapter 17, travel

overseas and domestically, for commerce and leisure, grew for those of the middling sort as well as the elite. Domestic pets too were a more visible novelty, with small dogs, monkeys and singing birds recorded not only in elite portraits and satires, but also in some non-elite inventories by the eighteenth century in England and France.

20.4 Mechanisms of consumption

At the heart of debates about what fuelled these changes is a disagreement about the mechanisms of consumption, drawn in turn from the language of economics. Which driver is the more powerful: ‘supply’ (that is, changing innovation in goods, production and modes of retailing) or ‘demand’ (the needs and wants of individuals and communities, and the means to fund such needs and wants)? Moreover, what are the motivations to consume? As the economic historian Jan de Vries has questioned, ‘where do new consumer aspirations come from? Do they originate with the elites ... and diffuse via emulation to lower social strata, or do [they] emerge from the self-motivated initiatives of multiple social groups, each with its own objectives?’ (de Vries, 2008, pp. 46–7).

Exercise 20.2

Turn to Reading 20.1, ‘Norwich probate inventory from 1666’, and Reading 20.2, ‘Norwich probate inventory from 1727’, located at the end of the chapter.

As you read the extracts, consider the following question:

- What differences in the goods listed do you note?

This should take around 30 minutes.

Discussion

The earlier inventory (Reading 20.1) records a more sparsely furnished kitchen, containing only ‘durable’ materials, such as pewter and iron. The later inventory (Reading 20.2) includes ‘semi-durable goods’, such as ceramics, and also one or two ‘consumer’ goods, such as the window curtains and delftware ceramics.

As you have seen in this inventory exercise, changing ‘demand’ can be measured simply by the multiplication of goods over time in households of similar socio-economic standing. This was not just a case of additional new goods – such as ‘delft basons’ or looking glasses – becoming part of the repertoire of objects available to buy and own, but also evidence of more extensive ownership of already

familiar items, such as chairs to sit on (as in Robert Rippin's inventory in Reading 20.2), bed-sheets or plates from which to eat.

Many of these goods, especially clothing and dress accessories, were associated with an intensified focus on personal appearance and display that is also evident in contemporary discourses. This 'self-fashioning' has been argued as a Renaissance phenomenon that involved not only philosophical shifts but also material investment – in textiles for body and household, furniture, animals and transport (Jardine, 1996, pp. 309–11). The rising tide of secular portraiture as a style of painting (rather than representations of religious subjects) was both one of the 'new ways of exploring personhood' and a new form of personal and familial 'consumer' good (Rublack, 2010, p. 36).

There were of course changing fashions in dress and other cultural products, like architecture, long before 1500. But, as we have seen, up until the sixteenth century their adoption was limited (by availability, cost and sumptuary legislation) to very tightly defined socio-political elites; and to the specific geographies of princely and royal courts, and powerful trading cities like Antwerp and Venice. Fashions in dress, clothing textiles and accessories turned over with increasing rapidity across sixteenth-century Europe, thanks in part to accelerating urbanisation but also to more discussion around their moral and economic consequences. Commentators on both sides of the Reformation divide in the mid- to late sixteenth century singled out the quickening cycle of clothing fashion as a solvent of both social distinction and social mores. In Catholic Augsburg in 1561 Veit Konrad Schwarz noted how society was becoming 'more and more foolish ... there is no end to the new strange modes of dress' (quoted in Rublack, 2010, p. 78), while in Elizabethan England the Puritan commentator Philip Stubbes (c.1555–c.1610) blamed the tailors 'who do nothing else but invent new fashions, disguised shapes, and monstrous forms of apparel every day' (Stubbes, 1583, p. 79). In the face of such swift-moving markets and fashions, however, the enforcement of sumptuary laws tended to decline and in Britain, although not repealed, they fell into disuse at the end of the sixteenth century. Even authorities with long traditions of sumptuary regulation, as in Venice and Leipzig, could no longer sustain controls by the end of the eighteenth century (Rublack, 2010, pp. 267–8; Allerston, 2007).

The availability of new fashions cannot by itself explain their uptake, however. Social emulation, or the 'trickle-down' effect, has also often been cited as creating the demand for changing fashions in goods,

especially in the second half of the period covered by the module. In mid-seventeenth-century Europe, tea- and chocolate-drinking began as prestige practices among elites at the royal courts in England, France, Spain and central Europe, carrying with them a luxury material culture of associated equipment. But the practice was seen and experienced by those in lower social groups – notably by the domestic servants often tasked with serving these drinks to their masters and mistresses – becoming an aspirational activity among such groups. The young female servant in the mid-eighteenth-century image in Figure 20.4 has taken a moment from her labours in the kitchen (you can just glimpse the warming pan hung up, and a plain hearth reflected in the mirror) to admire her necklace, and perhaps take a sip from the gilt-rimmed chocolate cup (from its quality, clearly not her own), before she goes on with her work.

The search for comfort also fuelled demand for certain domestic consumption goods. The increasing presence of window-glazing and window curtains (again, listed in Robert Rippin's Norwich kitchen in 1727, as you saw in Reading 20.2), upholstered furniture and better-quality bedlinens, as well as soft textiles like cushions and carpets, in even modest households, signalled the desire to make these spaces places of warmth, comfort *and* display. Early modern Parisians used certain types of tapestry in their bedchambers, not only as 'a success symbol, a sign of aesthetic conformism' but as 'an essential element of preserving warmth' (Roche, 1987, p. 152).

The desires for comfort and to emulate one's betters have nevertheless attracted criticism as drivers of consumption, as they put all the emphasis on *cultural* behaviours. As most economic historians stress, rising material expectations are born of *economic* circumstances as well as cultural aspirations. Jan de Vries has coined the phrase 'the industrious revolution' to explain what he sees as an important behavioural change in the Low Countries and England across the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, on the part of working people. Instead of producing a range of goods mainly for home consumption, these householders prioritised production for the market, working more intensively to produce a money surplus that could then be spent on goods that enriched the material environments in which they lived. In other words, particularly in urban areas, more of the family, including children, worked for money, generally for wages. They were then in a position to purchase ordinary household items they would previously have made themselves. This was not about emulation,

but rather about time- and labour-reallocation and the material rewards this could deliver (de Vries, 2008, p. 82). This is an important acknowledgement that the 'painstaking' people (the term Daniel Defoe (c.1660–1731) used for those who worked hard for their living) also seemed to be making strategic decisions in their working patterns in order to enable different consuming practices.



Figure 20.4 Jean Valade, *Girl with Mirror*, c.1750, pastel on paper, 58 x 48 cm. Private collection. Photo: © Christie's Images / Bridgeman Images.

This returns us from the ‘demand’ to the ‘supply’ side. By the end of our period more people owned more domestic furnishings and clothing than their fifteenth-century forebears: material testimony to both the changing velocities and widening range of manufactures, as well as their availability at a broader range of prices and qualities. This was in part a consequence of extra-European trading. Although ports like Genoa and Venice had long traded eastwards into the Middle and Far East, bringing ceramics from Persia, textiles from China and spices from the **Levant** and South-East Asia, the expanding reach of this trading into northern Europe, along with the push westwards to discover alternative routes to those eastern riches, literally redrew the world map from the late fifteenth century onwards. As communities and states alike saw the merits of funding merchants to ‘adventure’ to these new worlds, so the new institutional trading companies that arose out of such ventures took risks on new commodities, such as beaver hats, tobacco and Far Eastern ceramics. In England alone in the space of 50 years were founded the Muscovy Company (1555), the Levant Company (1561), the Virginia Company (1606) and, of course, the East India Company (1600); other states, notably the newly independent Dutch Republic, followed suit, with the Dutch East India Company founded in 1606.

At the same time, given what we have already read about the concerns voiced about negative effects on domestic balances of trade by too many ‘forraign’ imports, domestic producers responded to the challenges posed by imported goods, by developing techniques to imitate or substitute for them. In sixteenth-century Italy and Spain, Turkish and Far Eastern decorative ceramics were substituted by the colourfully glazed earthenware known as *maiolica*; by the eighteenth century, luxury imports of commodities like French and Italian silks had to compete in England with home-produced Spitalfields silks (as you learned in Chapter 16), and Chinese porcelains with those from Meissen in modern-day eastern Germany and Sèvres in France. State controls in the form of monopolies and patents were used to encourage migrant makers who brought with them the ‘secrets’ of making valued materials and were crucial in promoting a culture of innovation. In Elizabethan England, for example, the Italian emigrant Jacopo Verzelini (1522–1606) was awarded a monopoly to recreate the highly valued *cristallo* glass; a century later, in the 1670s, the home-grown inventor George Ravenscroft (1632/3–1683) sought patents to protect his experiments producing lead crystal glass. In the eighteenth century, import restrictions on French silk allowed a domestic industry

to flourish, in Spitalfields in London and provincial centres like Macclesfield in Cheshire. These substitute products helped stimulate domestic economies and keep valuable currency circulating at home rather than abroad: 'manufacture and technology ... contributed to the aesthetics of goods, but they were also important to national representations and policies' (Berg, 2005, p. 88).

Online session 20.3

Now go to the module website and complete online session 20.3. This should take around an hour and 20 minutes.

20.5 Spaces of consumption in early modern Europe

By now you will already have realised that it is not only what was consumed or available for consumption that matters – we also need to think about where goods were consumed and to map the changing spaces and geographies of consumption, in order to understand how experiences of and access to new goods reshaped consuming practices. As we have seen in the relationship between the nobility and the crown in many states, the court was just one such significant site for trendsetting and conspicuous consumption at the beginning of our period, just as cities offered up the main points of access to luxury goods and their producers. By the 1780s, however, exclusive venues like these had been supplanted by cheap print and retail shops in villages, as no less important sites for both learning about new goods and practices, and accessing them.

Before we look at changing print and retailing practices, we need to explore the primary consuming ‘space’ in the lives of most early modern people: the household. The physical household, elite or plebeian (a term historians use for those who worked, usually at manual trades, for their livings), was the destination for goods purchased, but also the environment in which goods sometimes became possessions, helping turn the physical house into an emotionally rich ‘home’. After all, it was for the household economy – the sustaining of those who lived and worked together within it – that instrumental decisions were made about how any income might be spent (de Vries, 2008).

These decisions can be glimpsed in domestic account books, which show us not only entries of goods purchased (and so not home-made), but also when goods were repaired and maintained. The seasonal and longer-term cycles of household consumption can also be traced, taking into account life events like births and economic issues like under- or unemployment. Of course, not everybody kept accounts, especially among the working poor, but occasionally we do have surviving records from working households. The account book we have for Richard Latham (1699–1767), a small-scale farmer and textile worker from north-west Lancashire in England, covers much of his married life. Started in 1724, the year he married his wife Ann (known as Nany; 1691–after 1767), it continues until his death and includes the

period in which eight children were born to the Lathams; four either left home or died during the same period (Weatherill, 1990, pp. xii–xiv).

Exercise 20.3

Turn to Reading 20.3, 'Extracts from the Latham household accounts, February 1729' and Reading 20.4, 'Extracts from the Latham household accounts, July 1753', located at the end of the chapter.

After you have read these, answer the following question:

- What do these extracts tell you about the household's consumption practices, and what may have affected those practices?

This should take around 40 minutes.

Discussion

The two extracts relate to different times of the year, but also to different stages in the household life cycle. Reading 20.3 records the birth of a child, not long after the couple have married, and also possibly the celebrations that accompanied that birth, which can be seen as conspicuous consumption at a modest level (biscuits, bought-in bread).

Reading 20.4 suggests a household spending mostly on necessities rather than luxuries, including medical help when one of the family is ill. While there are no references to any 'fashionable' purchases, the household does own a clock and has access to 'new' consumables such as sugar, rice and tobacco.

The Latham accounts in general are revealing about the small windows of consuming opportunity in a labouring household opened up by custom (as in the birth of a child here), but also by changing family size: in 1753 there were five daughters still at home, but four of them contributed their labour to the household. They can also tell us about the choices made as to how the family allocated their productive forces. In this agricultural household the focus was on meat and yarn production (linen, wool and cotton spinning), rather than dairying: cheese was bought in, rather than made. Fluctuations in family income clearly affected purchasing power. While the household could sometimes afford to buy in bread (for instance in 1729, as you saw in Reading 20.3), at other times circumstances dictated that bread would

be made in-house (as Reading 20.4 includes a record in 1753 of payment for wheat being milled). There is also evidence here of home-grown vegetables (potatoes, onions, garlic), but bought-in medical treatments and soap.

The Latham accounts lead us to another aspect of the changing landscapes of consumption in the early modern period. Although the family lived in rural north-west England, their purchases reveal they must have lived reasonably close to a shop (or two): treacle, rice, soap, candles and currants did not usually come from more traditional food retailers such as the butcher or baker, but from the stocks of the grocer or general shopkeeper.

Alongside a revolution in consumption, historians have posited a revolution in commercial enterprise. This transformed towns from agricultural marketplaces to urbane shopping centres and gave rise to the modern retail shop, a civilised competitor to market stalls, artisanal workshops, itinerant pedlars and street-sellers as the means of commercial exchange (Welch, 2012, p. 231). While the refined interior of an imagined furrier's shop shown in Figure 20.5, from the French *Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers* ('Encyclopaedia, or A Systematic Dictionary of the Sciences, Arts, and Crafts') – you will be learning more about this work in the chapter 'Ideas and the Enlightenment' (Chapter 23) – was materially a world away from the general shop Latham and his family were probably served by, they shared a prime service function: to bring new goods, new tastes and new ideas before potential customers. The art of shopping – involving not only the creation of seductive interiors and beautiful product displays, but also the conduct of the polite customer, able to converse intelligently about the products on display, and show taste and acumen in her purchases – was a significant by-product of this reconfiguration of retail spaces (Stobart et al., 2007, pp. 111–70; Berg, 2005, pp. 247–78).

Yet not every act of consumption in eighteenth-century Europe became a shop-based transaction, even if specialist shops could be found in some of the most remote corners of the continent by the end of the century. While some forms of retailing, especially by travelling pedlars and street-sellers, were increasingly seen as less respectable by authorities, they continued to serve an important purpose for both urban and rural householders, bringing cheap and cheerful prints and ballads, dress accessories and small textiles, ingredients and ready-made



Figure 20.5 Unknown engraver, 'Furrier's shop with muff-lined walls and pelts hung from the rafters', from Denis Diderot and Jean-Baptiste le Rond d'Alembert, *L'Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers* (*The Encyclopaedia, or A Systematic Dictionary of the Sciences, Arts and Crafts*), 1751–72, Neufchâtel, Switzerland. Photo: © The Print Collector / Alamy Stock Photo.

foods, basic tools and non-essential trinkets right to the door (Welch, 2012, pp. 238–41). Open markets and periodic fairs may have been less widespread in 1750 than they were across Europe in the early sixteenth century, yet in countries like France that were still largely agrarian they

operated as ‘the shop-window of plenty’ in ‘an economy of scarcity’, offering up the chance for people to see new goods, encounter new tastes and consume new forms of entertainment (Roche, 2000, pp. 47–9).

No less importantly, not all commerce was about buying and selling new goods. Refined shops as well as backstreet brokers dealt in second-hand clothes, while metalworkers took in old brass, pewter and other plate, in exchange for new products. Auction sales of household furnishings were commonplace in early modern Europe, from Scandinavia to Rome, for elite *and* plebeian purchasers alike: the sale of the worldly goods of the late Cardinal Flavio Orsini (1532–1581), witnessed in Rome by Michel Montaigne (1533–1592) in 1581, and the village auctions in eighteenth-century rural Alost (in the Low Countries) were both concerned with selling second-hand (Welch, 2012, p. 247; Van Damme and Vermoesen, 2009). Changing consumption patterns were indeed dependent on accessing used goods even towards the end of the eighteenth century, as manufacturing capacities in all but a few sectors had not yet been transformed by industrialisation. So, when we look at eighteenth-century middling and plebeian inventories which contain ceramic teapots and cotton bed-hangings, we cannot be sure whether they entered these households as second-hand or new items, or through routes other than purchase, such as inheritance, an incredibly important form of non-retail acquisition in early modern Europe.

What all these sites of commerce – the street, the shop, the auction – fed was knowledge: of goods and their manufacture, materials and forms, of prices and of value, and of the uses to which these goods might be put. Plebeian householders might not have bought anything in a luxury establishment like the *Encyclopédie*’s furrier’s shop (if indeed they had been allowed in), but this did not stop them acquiring the know-how essential to effective consumption.

Consuming know-how was also cultivated through another expanding consumer good: print. The triumph of the book in the early sixteenth century was followed by the triumph of print more generally, from sheet ballads to newspapers in the seventeenth century, and trade cards to product catalogues in the eighteenth (Berg, 2005, pp. 270–8; Jardine, 1996, pp. 135–80). As European literacy levels rose, especially in the towns, so too did the appetite for consuming information about the wider world, especially through the columns of newspapers, which early on made space for commercial advertisements. These small

insertions allowed readers to compare prices and to identify where bargains were to be had and who were the traders willing to strike the best bargains (or who at least promised to), building the toolkit of the modern consumer. As Daniel Roche argues, 'Printed matter, which implied a different way of understanding the mechanisms of the market and of distribution, contributed to the commercialising of persons as well as of things' (Roche, 2000, p. 51).

20.6 Who consumed in early modern Europe?

When historians use the language of ‘revolution’, they also use it to identify both those who stood at its epicentre and those who stood on the side-lines, spectating or simply excluded. While this chapter questions the use of the term ‘revolution’ in relation to changing patterns of consumption in early modern Europe, let us use this distinction for a moment. Traditionally historians had assumed that the ‘consumer revolution’ was an elite and largely urban phenomenon; but today more scholars think that if there was such a thing as a ‘revolution’ in consumption in early modern Europe, it was by no means universally or uniformly experienced, socially or geographically. Critics of the ‘consumer revolution’ have argued that, given the lack of attention to plebeian consuming and the marked tendency to focus on urban experiences rather than those of the countryside, the concept as currently applied addresses only a very narrow segment of early modern European society. In this section we will briefly consider the broader geographies of European consumption; and whether some categories of early modern consumer have been subject to too much – or too little – attention.

A classic distinction between urban advancement and rural stagnation has tended to colour accounts of early modern consumption, as it has of early modern commerce: for example, ‘the destiny of the early modern countryside [followed] that of the city, a story of delayed evolution and of a narrowing civilisational gap’ (Margairaz, 2012, p. 193). Given how profoundly rural much of early modern Europe remained, the impacts of fashion cycles, developments in retail practices and forms of communication around commodities, such as printed advertisements, would surely have been severely curtailed.

Yet while it is evident that in most parts of Europe rural consumption did not match the velocity, quality or range of goods found in urban households at even modest social levels, rural consumers nonetheless sought similar goods, albeit at one or two generational removes. We should therefore not bundle together everyone who lived in the countryside as ‘slow’ consumers, lagging behind urban taste-makers. Across the eighteenth century in parts of France, rural take-up of certain goods – upholstered furniture, mirrors, table- and bedlinens,

decorated ceramics – was on occasion more rapid than in comparable urban settings (Margairaz, 2012, p. 198).

Rural consumption of certain items could also *precede* urban uptake, as is the case with domestic clocks in late seventeenth-century England. While urban dwellers might continue to depend on the chimes of a parish church clock or look to another public clock for their time-keeping, Lake District farmers invested in case clocks like the one in Figure 20.6 (Glennie and Thrift, 2009, p. 176). Moreover, where 'consumer' goods do not appear in rural inventories, rather than seeing this absence of new goods as some measure of 'less adventurous' or traditional behaviour, we need to think about how households might already have had their needs and wants fulfilled via other conduits, or spent their money in different ways.

Status and wealth were important variables in the ownership of key consumer goods, as much as geographical location. In late eighteenth-century Barcelona and its suburbs, the peasants who maintained smallholdings and undertook other work as part of their patchwork of earning opportunities were closer in their consuming habits to rural agricultural workers in the surrounding countryside than they were to their artisan neighbours in the city, who owned more linens, chocolate pots and upholstered furniture (Margairaz, 2012, p. 200). Whether this can be explained as continued attachment to 'durables', or a greater valuation of 'useful things' over merely decorative ones is of course difficult to assess through the surviving sources. Enduring sumptuary restrictions across the German territories well into the eighteenth century seem to have been an effective brake on unfettered consumption, in cities as well as the countryside (Ogilvie et al., 2012, p. 31).

In truth, we still know very little about the consuming habits of the labouring sorts in early modern Europe. For example, how far were plebeian standards of living affected by the changing availability of imported ceramics or new fabrics and fashions; and what was their access to new goods? Research on plebeian clothing in England, the Netherlands and cities like Venice and Florence has been particularly revealing about the routes through which labouring people could procure far from worn-out and indeed still-modish clothing: as servants' perquisites (in-kind work benefits), via second-hand dealers and pawnbrokers, as well as in shops selling new clothing (Welch, 2012, pp. 246–7). This focus on plebeian clothing is valuable, but it casts other varieties of goods consumed by the poor into the shade.



Figure 20.6 Longcase clock, made in Ormskirk, Lancashire, c.1700–30, wood, steel brass and glass, height 213 cm. Rufford Old Hall, Lancashire, UK. Photo: © National Trust / Robert Thrift.

Yet, as the inventories drawn up by the regents of the Amsterdam Orphanage in the eighteenth century demonstrate, the sparse households from which its inmates were drawn contained tea- and coffee-wares and mirrors (sometimes without accompanying listings of more basic items, such as beds). By the end of our period, only the very poorest households in town or country had been left untouched by one or more of the new consumer goods, or by the 'commercial revolution' which facilitated their spread (McCants, 2013, pp. 322–33).

While rural and plebeian consumption practices need more light cast on them, gendered consumption has been more thoroughly explored. Some of the drivers of increasing consumption discussed above – fashion, changing domestic labour organisation (including domestic service), the rise of the shop – have been characterised as either inextricably feminine practices, or as having greater impacts on the social, cultural and (no less importantly) economic lives of women. The female servant we encountered in Figure 20.4 is depicted as a fashionable consumer, with her necklace, be-ribboned cap, mirror and taste for chocolate.

Contemporary vitriol about the excesses of consumption was directed not only at women (remember, *Luxuria* was embodied as a woman, as you saw in Figure 20.1), but at the feminising effects of excessive consumption on the other sex. Worries that new commodities and irrational tastes for such goods would unman society were widespread. In early and mid-eighteenth-century England they were focused on the insidious effects of French and other 'exotic' luxury goods emasculating the English martial male, at a time when the nation was almost continuously engaged in warfare. In his 1757 book *An Estimate of the Manners and Principles of the Times*, John Brown (1715–1766) looked back to the Jacobite uprising of 1745 with concern at what it revealed about English manhood: 'How far this dastard spirit of effeminacy hath crept upon us, and destroyed the national Spirit of Defence, may appear from the general Panic the *Nation* was thrown into, at the late *Rebellion*' (Brown, 1757, p. 91).

But is it productive to view early modern consumption through this particular lens? Consuming passions were not the preserve of one sex alone, and men consumed with a zest for fashionability and self-presentation that was not seen by contemporaries as especially emasculating. We need only look at the astonishing collection of self-portraits, the *Kleidungsbuchlein* ('Little Book of Clothes') of the accountant Matthäus Schwarz (1497–c.1574) from Augsburg

(Germany), compiled to record his wardrobe between 1520 and 1560, to see that clothing made and placed the man, as well as the woman (Rublack, 2010, pp. 33–78).

If wealthy and middling women, following in the footsteps of trendsetters like Mary II of England (1662–1694, reigned 1689–94), indulged in purchasing and displaying imported decorative ceramics, so their menfolk had their own obsessions, whether books (which are material objects no less than teacups) with which to furnish their libraries and studies, or the accoutrements of riding, hunting and other outdoor pursuits. In this sense, consuming was gender-neutral. What were gendered, however, were contemporary *attitudes* to these forms of consumption: while masculine book-collecting was about cultivating polite and useful knowledge, women's 'china-mania' was irrational and faddish. As the English writer John Gay quipped in his poem 'To a Lady on Her Passion for Old China' (1725), 'Husbands more covetous than sage / Condemn this *China*-buying rage; / They count that woman's prudence little, / Who sets her heart on things so brittle'. But as Gay also pointedly continued, 'But are those wise-men's inclinations / Fixt on more strong, more sure foundations?' (lines 49–54).

20.7 'Everyday' consumption?

Although this chapter began with luxury and conspicuous consumption, it ends on a more modest note. By focusing on luxurious (and often imported) goods, we underestimate the changing character of what historians like Daniel Roche have called 'everyday' material culture, the sorts of goods in daily use that do not often survive in museums. We need, however, to take more notice of this *inconspicuous* consumption.

One such 'good' is tobacco. Although clearly a 'forraign' good and certainly discussed by some historians alongside tea and coffee, tobacco has not been seen as part of the 'consumer revolution' as it had a very different, unluxurious trajectory in becoming a consumer staple. It generated a minimal and mundane material culture, which was in the most part male-focused, and was often consumed in sociable environments like taverns and coffee houses beyond the household; this moves it firmly beyond the feminised, domestic environs of eighteenth-century consumption narratives (Pennell, 2012, pp. 74–5). It is also a commodity that was mass-consumed across seventeenth-century Europe well before the 'new groceries' (sugar, tea, chocolate and so on), or globe-trotting textiles such as cotton (Shammas, 1990, pp. 79–80, especially Table 4.2). This mass consumption also prompted mass production (albeit by hand) of its chief piece of equipment, the clay tobacco pipe (see Figure 20.7). These pipes were as ephemeral as the tobacco smoked in them and consequently very, very cheap: the everyday, replaceable paraphernalia of a practice that swiftly became everyday itself.

Online session 20.4

Now go to the module website and complete online session 20.4. This should take around an hour.

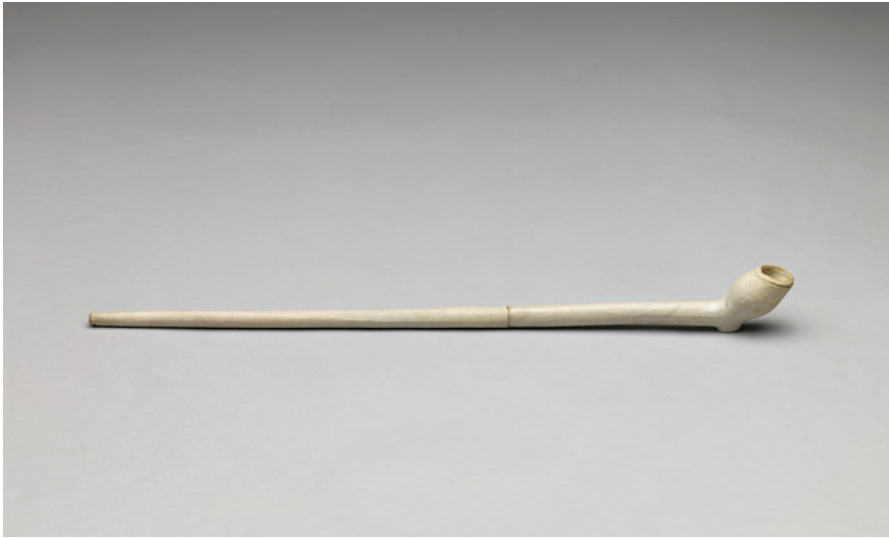


Figure 20.7 Unknown potter, tobacco pipe, seventeenth century, Dutch clay. Museum Boijmans van Beuningen, Netherlands. Photo: Museum Boijmans van Beuningen.

Conclusion

While some historians have sought to see in the European 'consumer revolution' a dramatic cultural and economic leap forward into modernity, this chapter has suggested a more circumspect view of early modern 'consumer society'; and counselled caution in using 'consumer' as a term we can assign to early modern people. For many, especially the labouring sorts and the poor, and those in regions which remained heavily agricultural, with conservative social and labour relations, material changes to lifestyles were small in scale and very episodic, with little exposure to discourses around fashion and taste; they consumed, yes, but very much still to survive, rather than as a transformational practice.

While across the period contemporary attitudes to consuming became more positive in tone, capable of bringing economic and social benefits to communities *as a whole*, certain groups, notably women and the poor, nonetheless retained their reputations as having unreliable, potentially threatening consuming passions. And while new forms of retailing and communication about new commodities were created and disseminated, other forms of commerce and exchange – the pedlar, the neighbourly exchange of goods over a tavern pint – neither disappeared, nor failed to accommodate new products (for example, the pipe of tobacco to seal the tavern deal). Newspapers and trade cards were as much the home of advertising the second-hand and services to repair existing possessions as they were showcases for the new and novel. For the majority, then, this was an *evolution* of consumption practices, not a *revolution* (Nijboer, 2005, p. 22). Early modern European consumption – its objects, its processes, its outcomes – did not pave a painless path to modern capitalism, any more than changing modes of manufacture and widening product ranges modelled modern mass production. Material goods and the behaviours they developed certainly changed the lives of many early modern people, from Scandinavia to Sicily, who consumed more; what is less clear is whether they changed them indisputably (and for ever) for the better.

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Readings

Reading 20.1 Norwich probate inventory from 1666

Source: Norfolk Record Office, Consistory Court Inventory ANW 52a/10.

[Extract from the probate inventory of Henry Hall, worsted weaver, of Norwich, taken 13 November 1666. The spelling in this reading has been modernised for clarity.]

In the Kitchin, feather bed, bedstead and bolster, a cold [hanging shelves] 4 pewter dishes, little kettle & skillet, an old chest, 2 old tables and chairs, a fire cradle with the implements thereto belonging, one iron pot, an old cupboard and a box [all valued together at £2 1s, of total domestic goods worth £3 16s]

Reading 20.2 Norwich probate inventory from 1727

Source: Norfolk Record Office, Consistory Court Inventory ANW/23/17[iii]/f.61.

[Extract from the probate inventory of Robert Rippin, worsted weaver, of St Benet's parish, Norwich, taken 10 April 1727. The spelling in this reading has been modernised for clarity.]

In the kitchen: a range, a fire pan, tongs, purr [poker], a toast iron, a pair of racks, a spit and a fire pan, a pair of tongs, a pair of bellows, a pot as it hangs, 2 brass candlesticks, a warming pan, a hake [possibly a type of knife or a drying frame], a box iron & heater [for ironing], 1 oval table, 1 square table, 10 chairs and a napkin press, 3 bird cages, 6 yarn poles [used in weaving], a looking glass, 5 delft basons, a gotch [large earthenware jug] and pot, a bed as it stands and window curtains [all valued together at £6 4s 6d, of total domestic goods worth £13 6s]

Reading 20.3 Extracts from the Latham household accounts, February 1729

Source: Weatherill, L. (ed.) (1990) *The Account Book of Richard Latham 1724–1767*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, pp. 15–16.

For cheese 13 $\frac{1}{2}$ lbs[,] 2s 9 $\frac{1}{2}$ d; pottetos setts half measure

For alicer [alegar, a type of vinegar] 2d; mending can 1d; laces 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ d; biskits [1d]

For tear [finest sort of fibre] of flax 8d; threed [thread] 1d; rice $\frac{1}{2}$ lb[,] 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ d

For use of £3 [i.e. interest on money borrowed] to Jane Barton 24th March 3s

For half measure of pottetos 1s 3d; sop [soap] 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ d; seeds onion [and] garlic 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ d

For 1 cheese of 12lbs[,] 2s 3d; 1lb manchets [a type of white bread, finer in quality than everyday bread] 1d

For flax 8d; sope 1d[;] manchets 2d; sugar 7d

For the midwife's office Mrs Gill at the birth of the child the 3rd day of April 1729[,] 2s 6d [p. 16]

For veal quarter 1s 4d; ginger 5d; corrans & groats [grain] 2d

For tobackow [tobacco] 1d; soap 1d; starch $\frac{1}{2}$ d; cup $\frac{1}{2}$ d; milk $\frac{1}{2}$ d[.]

Reading 20.4 Extracts from the Latham household accounts, July 1753

Source: Weatherill, L. (ed.) (1990) *The Account Book of Richard Latham 1724–1767*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, p. 91.

Dying 8 $\frac{1}{2}$ lbs woolen yarn 2 s 8d

10lbs more [dyeing] light blue 3s

1 measure of rye corn 3s 6d; shoeing mare [4 $\frac{1}{2}$ d]

peck of wheat at the mill 1s 4d; sop [6 $\frac{1}{2}$ d] ...

10 baskets of coals at pitt 18th July 1s 8d

rye corn 1 measure 3s 5d; candels [3 ½ d]

sugar and treacle 1s 4 1/2d; flour 6d

soap 6 ½ d; doctering stuff Nany ill lame [3s]

mutton 11 ½ d; sugar 3lbs[,] 1s 1d; 2d candles ...

dressing & mending clock Ned Howart 7th of August[;] new spring on
sticking wheel 1s 4d.

Chapter 21 Wealth, financial institutions and bubbles

Anne Laurence

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Learning outcomes

By the end of this chapter you should be able to:

- understand how the governments of the Netherlands, France and England developed new financial institutions
- appreciate how, alongside the government institutions, new opportunities opened for investment in commercial enterprises, especially those involved in overseas trade
- explain how the financial world of early modern Europe changed, not just for governments and financial professions, but for individuals too.

Introduction

This chapter concerns the changes that took place in the economic life of western Europe that, by the accounts of some historians, amounted to a financial revolution, a complete transformation in the way in which the financial affairs of governments, corporate bodies such as trading companies, and individuals were run. It opens with a brief account of how this all began.

By the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries Italian banks were managing international transfers of money between countries, as well as loans to and deposits from merchants and governments. The financial changes that took place in western Europe between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries introduced a new scale of financial activity in which governments themselves were essential participants in financial markets, with the introduction of central banks and **national debts**. Some of these developments arose because of European rulers' needs to be able to sustain warfare continuously for long periods, as you saw in the chapters 'States and people: the growth of governance in early modern Europe' and 'Religious conflict, emigration and coexistence' (Chapters 18 and 19, respectively). The scale of warfare in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries relied on the capacity of rulers, both individuals and corporate bodies such as cities, to borrow money, since no amount of taxation or confiscation could support the large armies that had become a feature of warfare.

All of this has been extensively studied by economic historians interested in counting the scale of government debt, the yields from taxation, the mechanics of the great financial booms and busts, and the operations of the new financial institutions such as stock exchanges and national banks. More recently, social and cultural historians have looked at the changes in culture that accompanied these economic transformations and social historians have looked at the effects on the lives of people outside the world of government and finance.

This chapter is concerned with these cultural and social changes. It connects with the chapters 'Work and reward' (Chapter 5 in Book 1), 'Industry before industrialisation' (Chapter 15 in Book 2) and 'Early modern Europe: a "consumer revolution"?' (Chapter 20) in that it deals with people's economic activity, but it introduces a kind of economic activity that isn't discussed in the set book: the rise of finance and wealth creation independent of land or trade, a

development that coincided with governments taking on long-term debt to enlarge their capacity for warfare. These changes affected ordinary citizens as well as governments and the wealthy. Importantly, more and more people became part of an economy in which goods and services were traded for money rather than exchanged for labour or crops. The increasing range of goods and services available for purchase is, as you saw in Chapter 20, what is sometimes described as the ‘consumer revolution’.

The chapter is also concerned with two important historical theses which I shall return to briefly later. You do not need to know about them in detail, but they have both influenced the shape of studies of past economies and of people as economic actors. They are associated with the eighteenth-century economist Adam Smith and with the twentieth-century historian John Brewer, respectively.

Adam Smith (1723–1790) wrote about the economy as being guided by an ‘invisible hand’. He used this metaphor to describe the development of an impersonal market where everyone sought to maximise their profits without regard to others. An illustration of what he meant is provided by the lending of money, especially of small sums to private individuals. There were no banks for such people in 1500, so all such transactions were carried out between individuals who knew each other and were bound by the kinds of obligation that made it difficult to default on repayment. It was also difficult to enforce repayment at law. Sometimes lenders were goldsmiths or scriveners; sometimes they were private individuals. There was a significant market in micro-credit where the lenders were widows or spinsters. During the following two centuries the law evolved to make it easier for creditors (people who were owed money) to reclaim debts. In addition, commercial companies became money-lenders: by 1780 there were banks and pawnshops.

In 1989 John Brewer published an influential book titled *The Sinews of Power: War, Money and the English State, 1688–1783*. He argued that the ability of the English state to fight wars more or less continuously throughout the eighteenth century was the consequence of the government being able to raise taxes through parliamentary consent to support armies and navies. The prevailing orthodoxy had argued that it was the state’s capacity to raise money through *loans* that had financed the wars. Brewer changed the balance of the argument away from the development of financial institutions (notably the Bank of England and

the national debt) towards the combination of greater prosperity, consent to taxation and the ability to collect it effectively.

The chapter opens with a brief narrative history because this is an area that your set book does not cover, and goes on to consider the effects of these changes on culture and society. But what changes are we talking about? When put down succinctly they seem dry and hard to comprehend, but much of what we shall look at is the everyday stuff of today's news because it concerns the world in which we live today: government defaults; government debt; the role of central banks (such as the Bank of England or the European Central Bank); the fluctuations of the stock market, interest rates and foreign exchange; and the ways in which this business affects people's lives. This is not about the equivalent of the financial pages of the broadsheet newspapers; it's about people in the UK queuing to get their money out of the Northern Rock bank in 2007, fearful of the bank defaulting. The chapter then explores these ideas in more detail through three case studies of financial booms, bubbles and busts that helped to change attitudes to the financial world of early modern Europe.

21.1 Financial institutions and government debt

In 1500 rulers were expected to finance the costs of government from revenues based on their personal landholdings and any taxes that they were entitled to collect. When they ran short of money they either went for loans to bankers and goldsmiths known to them, such as the Fuggers in the free imperial city of Augsburg in Germany, the Medici in Florence, or the Genoese bankers; or they failed to pay their armies and navies, and the people who supplied food and clothing to the court and the military. Failing to pay soldiers and sailors had consequences for civil order. The Italian cities, acting as sovereign territories, already had sophisticated banking arrangements to provide loans for merchants and to allow them to transfer money between different places both at home and abroad. Money deposited by merchants with these banks was used to provide loans to the papacy and to secular rulers, not just in Italy. This kind of financial activity relied on personal relationships of trust between borrowers and lenders.

But during the sixteenth century another territory, the Netherlands, part of the Habsburg Empire, developed a different method of raising money, by selling **bonds** to support the state's activities. The bonds (a form of loan to the government) provided an income to purchasers through interest payments, and were redeemable. This capacity to raise funds allowed the northern Netherlands to conduct a successful military and naval campaign against its Spanish overlords from the 1560s and to become an independent state in 1609 (ratified in 1648). By 1780 many European states had national debts, where governments, removed from the personal control of monarchs, although run by ministers appointed by monarchs, could raise money by issuing bonds to supplement taxation income.

Alongside the development of markets in government bonds during the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, there developed companies that needed capital to finance activities in exploration and sending fleets of ships to distant parts of the world in search of new materials and goods. These companies (such as the Dutch and English East India Companies, the Royal African Company, the South Sea Company and the French Compagnie des Indes) were licensed by their governments to raise capital by selling shares in the company.

National debts and financial markets were managed in a variety of ways, but a common feature was the creation of what we would now call central banks and stock markets. The Bank of Amsterdam (the central bank for the Dutch Netherlands) was established in 1609 and was largely used for transferring payments arising from foreign trade in different currencies into domestic payments (Atack, 2009, p. 11). The Amsterdam stock exchange was established in 1602 by the Dutch East India Company in order to manage the **secondary market** in shares in the company (in other words, shares bought from shareholders rather than issued directly by the company). The Bank of England was founded in 1694. It was both a central bank for the government and a private bank in which people could buy shares and it had private customers who used the bank for their personal accounts. While the Amsterdam stock exchange had a dedicated building, in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries trading in shares in London took place in coffee houses round Exchange Alley in the city. Trading in stocks in London was recognised in law and was increasingly regulated by the government. France managed these matters rather differently; after the catastrophe of the Mississippi scheme in 1719–20 (discussed below) it did not have a central bank, while stocks were traded in Rue Quincampoix in Paris.

The market in government bonds and company shares created groups of people whose job it was to trade them. These people – **stock-jobbers** (comparable to modern stockbrokers) – were widely regarded as earning their living improperly and were the subject of concerted attacks by moralists, newspapers and the general public. Speculative financial activity was regarded as effeminate, relying on emotion and appetite rather than on rationality and hard work. This was represented in contemporary cartoons showing folly, the market and fortune all as female figures. The French engraving reproduced as Figure 21.1 shows traders on the right and the naked figure of Fortune in her chariot throwing shares, snakes and fools' hats into the crowd. The chariot is driven by Madness in a crinoline, and pulled by the various characters involved in John Law's French Mississippi scheme (of which more later).

Finally, this period is associated with the emergence of a class of very rich people whose wealth lay in money and investments rather than in land, the traditional source of riches and territorial power. While the



Figure 21.1 Unknown artist, *Mississippi, or a monument dedicated to posterity in memory of the unbelievable madness of the twentieth year of the eighteenth century*, c.1720, engraving, 29 x 36 cm. Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin, USA. Photo: Harry Ransom Center, Austin.

great bankers and goldsmiths of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Germany and Italy had money and gold, they also made sure that they owned some land. By the late seventeenth century, however, in England and the Netherlands there were people whose wealth was close in value to that of the greatest landed nobles but who were not themselves great landowners.

21.2 Debt and credit, borrowing and lending

Late medieval monarchs expected to pay the costs of government and warfare out of their personal incomes, through taxation or by invoking their right to require their tenants and subjects to serve in their armies. But increasingly in the early modern period, even peacetime government became too costly to be met from personal revenues (an important cause of the English civil wars of 1642–49, when Parliament objected to the king's attempts to raise money without its consent). Monarchs had to resort to borrowing money and to extra taxation. Taxation was rarely permanent, except for the charge of 10 per cent of income levied by the Catholic Church and continued by many Protestant churches after the Reformation, but this was for the use of the church, not of the ruler. As the costs of both warfare and government rose, new devices had to be found to raise money.

One new source of wealth for governments was the appropriation and exploitation of territories outside Europe, a particularly important source of revenue for Spain. In 1556 Spain had become a kingdom independent of the Holy Roman Empire, of which it had previously been a part. The Low Countries (the territories today made up of the Netherlands, Luxembourg and Belgium) and certain lands in Italy remained part of the king of Spain's possessions. The expansion of Spanish power across the Atlantic, in South America and the Caribbean, brought great wealth after the discovery of silver in Mexico and Peru, but also massive inflation in Spain. American silver was converted into currency to buy the luxury items that followed from the expansion of European commerce with the east (spices, silks, ceramics). At the same time, the Spanish kingdom was committed to large military and naval expenditure in order to secure its colonial territories and to conduct wars in Italy, in the Low Countries and with England in the sixteenth century and with France in the seventeenth century, as well as contributing money and troops to the Thirty Years' War (1618–48). Six times in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the Spanish government defaulted on its debts: civil servants, diplomats, sailors and soldiers went unpaid, as did banks who had lent the crown money.

Why were bankers such as the Fuggers in Augsburg prepared to continue to lend to the Spanish crown? The king of Spain, like other indebted rulers, had not only a continuing supply of Spanish silver but also extensive personal lands, and the power to tax his subjects. So the bankers who lent to Philip II of Spain (1527–1598, reigned 1556–98) foresaw the possibility of repayment and charged him interest at 20 per cent (Drelichman and Voth, 2014, p. 206). But while the state of the Spanish economy might have been advantageous to the banks, the country's economic decline was apparent to the king's subjects. In 1600 a Spanish commentator, Martín González de Cellorigo (1559–c.1633), wrote about the economic decline of Spain.

Exercise 21.1

Turn to Reading 21.1, Martín González de Cellorigo, 'The restoration of the republic' (1600), located at the end of the chapter.

After you have read this, answer the following question:

- How did de Cellorigo view the wealth from precious metals in Spain?

This should take around 15 minutes.

Discussion

De Cellorigo regarded the influx of precious metals as the source of Spain's decline because it deflected people from what he regarded as the true source of Spain's wealth: human industry, especially in agriculture. There is a strong tone of moral disapproval here: de Cellorigo thought that unearned wealth was making the Spanish population lazy. But note that he did not regard the war in Flanders as the source of the impoverishment of the nation.

De Cellorigo's analysis did not meet with universal agreement. In 1653 a Venetian commented that to understand how the richest country in the world (Spain) had become the poorest, one must first be convinced that no people in the world were so ignorant of the art of good government (Ehrenberg, 2013 [1928], p. 336).

Not all rulers, however, had access either to Spanish silver and gold, or to loans from bankers. The Low Countries, while under the rule of Spain, had supplied two of the Habsburgs’ important financial centres, Amsterdam and Antwerp, both great ports, with financial services to support merchants trading across the world. The Dutch Revolt which began in 1566, when the Protestant north fought to shake off the rule of Catholic Spain, led to a Protestant blockade of Antwerp. It also led to a need for the northern Netherlands to raise money to support its anti-Spanish campaign. From the sixteenth century Dutch cities were selling annuities paying a rate of 6.25 per cent interest. The Amsterdam stock exchange was founded in 1602 by the Dutch East India Company and the Bank of Amsterdam was founded in 1609 (Fritschy et al., 2012, p. 44) and, as we saw earlier, sold bonds to raise money. During the seventeenth century the United Provinces (as the northern Netherlands became known) prospered through its foreign trade: its commerce with the East Indies was valuable, but more important was its shipping of grain and timber from northern Europe to the Mediterranean. Amsterdam took over a good deal of the trade that had formerly gone to Antwerp before the Dutch blockade (Tracy, 1985, pp. 2, 195).

Table 21.1 Europe’s great powers: measures of might

	Armed troops in 1,000s			Government revenues in tons of silver per annum		
	1550	1700	Change	1550	1700	Change
France	57	342	+285	294	878	+584
Spain	163	63	-100	431	219	-212
England	66	191	+125	66	559	+494

Source: Mauricio Drelichman and Hans-Joachim Voth (2014), *Lending to the Borrower from Hell: Debt, Taxes and Default in the Age of Philip II*, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, p. 244, Table 27.

Table 21.1 illustrates how France and England were able to overtake Spain as military powers by the end of the seventeenth century by reason of their capacity to raise money from taxes and loans. But why did Spain fail to maintain its position? We’ve seen that de Cellorigo put Spain’s decline down to lack of effort by the Spanish workforce. Historians have subscribed to a similar explanation. Most recently it’s

been argued that the Spanish state's failure to develop workable institutions of government by 1700 was an important factor (Drelichman and Voth, 2014, p. 246).

France and Britain in the eighteenth century

During the later seventeenth century the monarchs of both France and England (this is the period before the latter's Act of Union with Scotland in 1707) ran into severe financial difficulties, primarily because of the wars they conducted against each other. Between 1689 and 1783 there were four periods of warfare (amounting to 49 years) between the two states. During that time, expenditure on the military amounted to over 60 per cent of the government spending of England (after 1707, Britain) (Brewer, 1989, pp. 27, 40, 41). The wars of the 1680s and 1690s forced the governments of both countries to find new ways of financing the later conflicts of 1702–13. The British government was so successful in doing this that the country also supported wars for the further periods 1739–63 and 1775–83 largely with the assent of the British public through Parliament. In France, however, the absolutist monarchy carried on the wars while trying to raise taxes to which no one had agreed, ultimately leading to the French Revolution in 1789. What follows goes some way to explain how it was that Britain underwent a financial revolution while France underwent a later political revolution. Figure 21.2 shows how the amount of British government borrowing grew during the eighteenth century, the steepest rises coinciding with periods of warfare or with the financial boom of the South Sea Bubble in 1720.

Having outpaced Spain by 1700, the essence of what went on in the early eighteenth century was the development of public debt: governments selling various forms of bonds which represented loans from subjects to the government. One of the significant ways in which the government in England raised money in the 1690s was by means of lotteries. These differed from modern lotteries insofar as the principal (the original stake) was recoverable. Lottery tickets paid out annuities and the tickets could be sold (the annuities were also transferable). Another way that the government raised money was by borrowing in anticipation of tax revenues to be collected in the near future. A third was to sell to the general public bills issued by the Exchequer and carrying interest. All of these devices were ways of the government borrowing money on future revenues. By the time of the

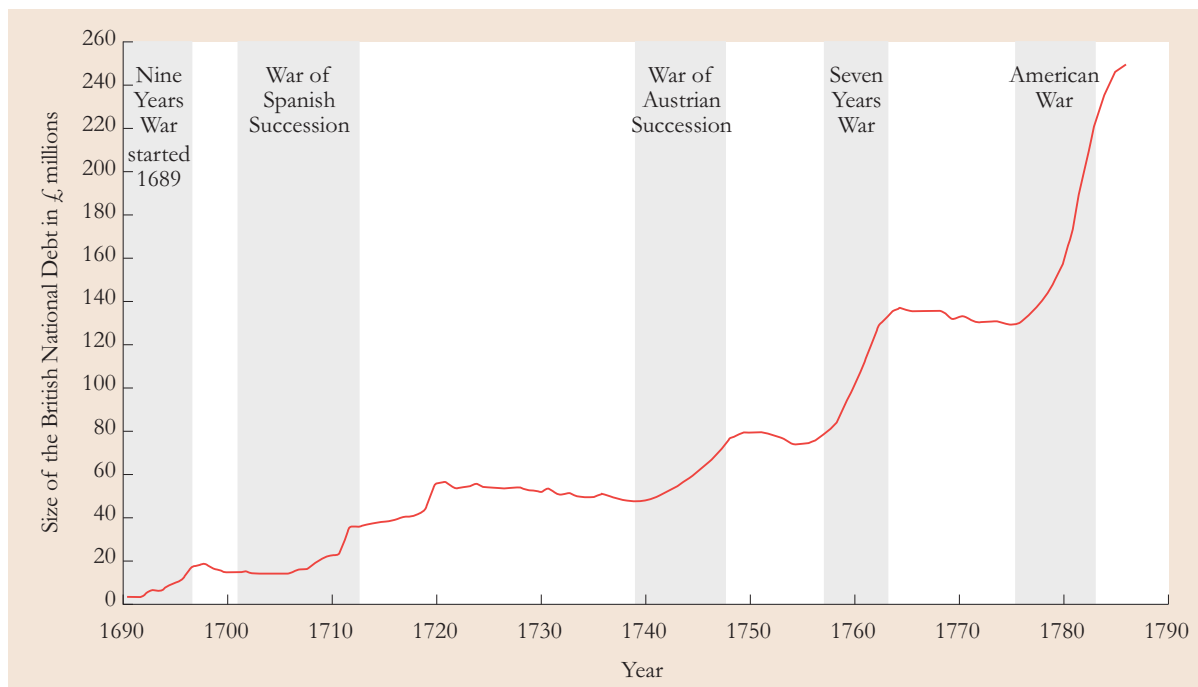


Figure 21.2 Size of the British national debt 1692–1790, from John Brewer (1989) *The Sinews of Power: War, Money and the English State, 1688–1783*, London, Unwin Hyman, p. 115, Figure 4.6.

death of Queen Anne (1665–1714, reigned 1702–14) the government had little hope of meeting its commitments in respect of any of these payments, so it sought to sell off the debt to an organisation which would take over its liabilities. In the event, what the government did was to sell its debt to the South Sea Company, which now became responsible for paying out to everyone who thought they were lending money to the government. This the company did by substituting shares in the company for lottery tickets and government bonds.

By the early eighteenth century the French government faced the same problem as the British government, in that its debts exceeded its capacity to pay them. In 1715 tax revenue was 69 million livres, while annual expenditure was 77 million livres even after the wars with Britain had then ceased; in addition, the government was committed to payments of 90 million livres a year in interest on its 2 billion livre debt (Murphy, 1997, p. 128). Tax collection was much less effective than it was in England. Almost all French taxes were collected by ‘tax farmers’: individuals who, in return for advancing money to the government, were responsible for the enforcement and effective

collection of taxes from the public, offering opportunities for considerable corruption. In Britain taxes were collected by government officials. In addition, in France the nobility was exempt from paying most taxes.

It was always unlikely that collecting revenues was going to solve the problem, so the French government fell in with the schemes of a Scottish financier, John Law (c.1671–1729), who had settled in Paris. He proposed to restructure the public finances so that government income and expenditure were managed in the same system. Law is regarded by some historians as a financial genius thwarted by the limitations of eighteenth-century financial institutions, and by others as a conman. In 1716 he established a private bank which issued paper money and which had acquired a large amount of the French government debt (Atack, 2009, p. 14). People who had lent the government money in various ways received, instead of the assurance that what they were owed was backed by the government, shares in a private bank: a much riskier prospect. Law also took over the collection of indirect taxes such as customs duties and sales taxes. Then, in 1717, Law took over the Mississippi Company (trading in the huge region now comprising the US states of Louisiana, Mississippi, Arkansas, Missouri, Illinois, Iowa, Wisconsin and Minnesota), and offered other holders of government debt shares in the company. Meanwhile the government granted him the right to collect direct taxes. By various means Law maintained a high share price for the Mississippi stock, which encouraged holders of government debt to exchange that debt for Mississippi Company shares. The bank and the company then merged and it appeared that the value of the capital of the bank and the company together was less than their obligations to shareholders (so the price of the shares fell sharply as investors sold in an attempt to recover what they could of their investment). Figure 21.3 shows the rise in the price of stock in the Mississippi Company to a peak in January 1720, and its subsequent fall. But note that investors lost money only if they sold their stock before June 1720. (We shall return to this point shortly.)



Figure 21.3 Share prices for the Mississippi Company 1719–1720, from Antoin E. Murphy (1997) *John Law: Economic Theorist and Policy-Maker*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, p. 207, Chart 14.1.

From public debt to private debt

Debt was not just a public or commercial matter. Many private individuals ran up debt. Castilian noble families took on large debt in the late sixteenth century which, guaranteed by the crown, ensured their dependence on the monarchy (Jago, 1973, p. 219). The English aristocracy expected to find itself in debt in order to raise the cash for dowries for daughters without compromising the family lands – they borrowed on the security of their land. The French aristocracy was an immensely privileged group exempt from military service and from most taxes. Attendance at court by French nobles – necessary to ensure that they were noticed when valuable offices and emoluments were distributed – involved expenditure on the accoutrements of court life, and the purchase of offices in the royal administration required large sums of often borrowed money. Some of this might be regarded as investment in securing favours that would provide future income.

At the other end of the social scale European peasantries were known for their dependence on borrowing to survive, especially in years of poor harvests. In some societies debt was part of the life cycle: young couples borrowed to set up a household, farm or business (Brennan, 2006, p. 194). Loss of a spouse, or old age and illness were likely to send poor people into debt if they were unable to work. But from whom did these people borrow? Sometimes their debt took the form of arrears to landlords; there was also a considerable business in what we'd now call micro-credit. There were professional money lenders, goldsmiths and scriveners and, for very small-scale lending, second-hand merchants and pawnbrokers. Individuals (often widows) who had small sums of cash would lend them at interest to neighbours. These financial relationships were very personal: they were between people who knew each other.

Why didn't these nobles and peasants just go and borrow money from the bank to meet their commitments? The answer is that for much of the early modern period banks did not take deposits and make loans at interest to ordinary citizens. Their chief function was to provide a service to merchants transferring funds from place to place, especially abroad, and to service governments. Banks to serve private citizens did not emerge until the eighteenth century, offering deposit facilities as well as services to transfer money and make payments, along with financial and investment advice to customers.

To return briefly to Brewer, you can see that much of this discussion relates to his arguments about the capacity of governments to continue to fund expensive warfare without defaulting and that the institutions in Britain proved to be more effective than those in France. To return to Adam Smith, individuals lending money to the government represented a much more impersonal matter than the local relations of credit on which people had relied for many centuries.

21.3 Booms, bubbles and busts

The early modern period is noteworthy not only for the development of new financial institutions and governments' capacity to raise funds for warfare, but also for the development of new forms of speculation, leading to what have become known as 'bubbles' in which prices rise very fast and fall very fast, as in the price of shares in the Mississippi Company (seen in Figure 21.3). In this section we look at three different kinds of bubble, ending with that byword for such speculation: the South Sea Bubble. These are examples of ventures in which individuals might have expected to make money, but because of a collapse in the market they lost it. As you will see in online session 21.2, it was usually those who lost most who shouted loudest, so in some cases the number of people who actually made money in these ventures is obscured.

The terms bubble and (speculative) boom are used interchangeably to describe an occasion when prices rise to unprecedented heights and then fall precipitately. In modern times the terms are most often used in connection with stock markets and currency, but it is possible to have a boom and a bust in prized goods.

Tulipmania

One of the best-known early modern financial bubbles is the fever known as 'tulipmania' in the Netherlands in the 1630s. The story used to be that tulip bulbs, newly imported from the east (from Constantinople: modern-day Istanbul) along with other new botanical objects of curiosity, became so popular but were in such limited supply that there developed a boom in prices, reaching a peak in 1637, when prices started to fall and huge sums of money were lost. This is an early example of heightened consumer demand in which demand so outstrips supply that prices rise, as you may see from the graph in Figure 21.4.

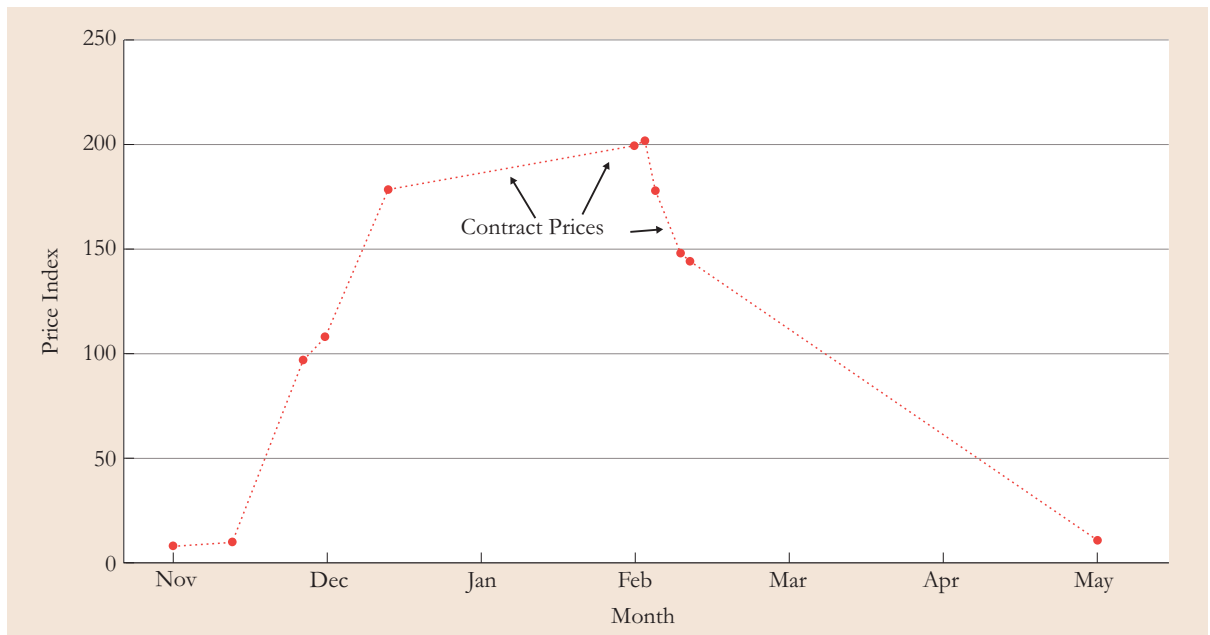


Figure 21.4 Tulip prices 1636–37, adapted from Earl A. Thompson (2007) ‘The tulipmania: fact or artifact?’, *Public Choice*, volume 130, numbers 1–2, p. 101, Figure 1.

Online session 21.1

Now go to the module website and complete online session 21.1. This should take around 30 minutes.

The Darien scheme: ‘Bought and sold for English gold’

You’ll have noticed that the schemes for repaying government debt in France and England were associated with overseas commercial enterprises. Overseas trade, especially beyond Europe, was seen from the Spanish experience as the source of extraordinary riches. In 1695 the Scots (Scotland was still then an independent country, though it shared a monarch with England) decided that they wanted to share in the wealth.

In the 1690s (when Scotland still had its own parliament and currency) William Paterson (1658–1719), a Scot who was one of the founding directors of the Bank of England, came up with a scheme for establishing a Scottish colony in Panama in Central America. In particular he proposed a trading post at Darien to take advantage of the growing transatlantic trade. To pursue this, in 1695 the Company of Scotland was formed and proposed to raise initial capital of £400,000.

Eager subscribers bought shares in 1696: the minimum subscription was £100, the maximum £3,000. The certificates signed by subscribers (Figure 21.5) imposed penalties for not paying up on time. The majority of the subscribers were Scots – attempts to find subscribers in London were unsuccessful partly because of opposition from businesses such as the East India Company and the Royal African Company. Of the 1,320 subscribers, 53 (4 per cent) were institutions such as the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh, the Faculty of Advocates and towns and cities throughout Scotland, but the value of their investment was 6.8 per cent of the capital raised. Of the individuals who subscribed there were a few notables such as the Marquis of Athol, the Earl of Kellie, the Provost (lord mayor) of Glasgow and the Lord Chancellor of Scotland; others included many merchants, tradesmen and lawyers from Glasgow, Edinburgh, Aberdeen, Dundee and smaller towns such as Dumfries. Ninety-one women bought subscriptions; they comprised 7 per cent of subscribers, but the value of their subscriptions was only 5.3 per cent of the capital. The largest single group of subscribers consisted of lairds – small landowners – who bought £100 and £200 subscriptions and provided 34 per cent of the capital (Watt, 2007, pp. 47, 57–61, 80; *A List*, 1696). Following the large number of subscriptions in February, March and April 1696 there was a small amount of buying and selling shares, but Scotland did not have anything that amounted to an organised financial market and, in any case, the £300,000 that had been raised by the middle of 1696 meant that few Scots had any money left for further subscriptions. Thus there was not, as there was to be with the Mississippi and South Sea schemes, a bubble when share prices rose far above the subscription price.

Thomas Andersone. sone. to Alex^r Andersone.
Seat Bailie. of Edinburgh ~~~~~ Obilge
I me, my Heirs, and Executors to pay to the Company
of Scotland, Trading to *Africa* and the *Indies*, or to whom
they shall appoint the Sum of *fifty pound Sterling* ~~~~~
As the fourth part of the Sum Subscribed for
by me, in the Capital Stock or Fund of the said Company,
and that betwixt and the first day of *June* Next, with the Sum
of *five pound sterling* ~~~~~ Money foresaid of
Liquidate Expences in case of Failzie by and attour the said
principal Sum with the due, and ordinary Annualrent of
the said principal Sum after the said day of Payment,
Yearly, Monthly and proportionally during the not pay-
ment. And for the more Security I am content and
Consents, That thir Presents be Registrate in the Books of
Council and Session, or in any other Judges Books competent,
to have the Strength of a Decreet of any of the Judges thereof
Interponed hereto, That Letters and Executorials of Horning
and Poining on a Charge of six Days and all others needfull
may pass hereupon in Form as Effairs; And for that Effect
constitute My
Procurators In Witness whereof I have Subscribed thir Pre-
sents at *Edinburgh* - the *twenty eight* - Day of *Februarie*.
One Thousand, six Hundred, and Ninty Six. Befor^r thir
witnesses *Patrick Scott* writter in *Edinburgh* and *Alex^r*
Paaric servitor to *James Balfour* *Att^r in Ed^r*
Patrick Scott witness. *Thomas Andersone*
Alex^r Paaric witness

Figure 21.5 Certificate for a subscription to the Company of Scotland, 1696. National Library of Scotland. Photo: Reproduced by permission of the National Library of Scotland.

Five ships and 1,200 people, including Paterson and his family, set off to their then unknown destination. Arriving at Darien in 1698, the settlers set about founding New Edinburgh on a swamp. The few survivors of dysentery and fever abandoned the colony in 1699 and returned home. A second expedition arrived later that year, unaware that the first colonists had left, and surrendered to Spanish forces. William III (1650–1702, reigned 1689–1702), at a delicate moment in Anglo-Spanish relations, ordered English forces in the vicinity not to assist the Scots for fear of jeopardising his negotiations with Spain.

Purchasers of shares paid by instalments, and many instalments were not made until long after the first expedition had set out (Watt, 2005, p. 106). The Company of Scotland even lent money to subscribers to fund their initial instalments (Watt, 2005, p. 108). In addition, one of the directors of the company embezzled £16,000 (Watt, 2005, p. 108). It's likely that the company never actually raised the full £400,000 (Watt, 2005, p. 115). Effectively, all the subscribers to the scheme lost every penny they had put in and the event was regarded as an expensive and ignominious failure. A request for assistance from England was met coolly and by 1707 the company had debts of £14,000 (Watt, 2005, p. 101). By then, after the Scottish Parliament had agreed to the English providing £400,000 for the liquidation of its debts and for the repayment of the subscribers to the Company of Scotland at 5 per cent interest, Scotland surrendered its independent parliament and sent MPs to Westminster (Watt, 2005, p. 116).

Exercise 21.2

Turn to Reading 21.2, 'Announcement in *Flying Post or The Post Master*, 20–22 April 1699', and Reading 21.3, 'William III's Letter to Parliament, from *Flying Post or The Post Master*, 2–5 November 1700', located at the end of the chapter.

After you have read the extracts, consider the following questions:

- What do we learn from these about Scots optimism for the scheme?
- And what do we learn about English reservations?

This should take around 20 minutes.

Discussion

- The enthusiasm for the scheme was signified by the rejoicing at the news of the safe arrival of the first ships by people attending the races at Cowper (Cupar). The directors were calling for subscribers to produce the first 5 per cent of their subscriptions to equip the next expedition and were recruiting 'such as they think fittest' to go with it.
- The king's letter to Parliament was very dampening. The syntax of the passage is difficult: 'that Our yielding in that Matter, had infallibly disturbed the general Peace' we would express as 'that Our yielding in that Matter *would have* disturbed the general Peace'. 'The general Peace of Christendom' and the possibility of 'a heavy War' are references to the delicate state of relations with Spain. William III did not want to have war with Spain when he was at war with France.

The South Sea Bubble

The consequences of the Darien scheme took a long time to play out and its failure, and the resulting financial losses, had very significant political consequences for Scotland. Let us now turn to the episode that is invoked even today when there is a financial bubble such as the dot.com boom: the South Sea Bubble.

The government in London, finding itself unable to meet the payments for people who had lent it money, chiefly through various kinds of bonds and annuities, to finance the wars with France (the Nine Years' War, 1688–97 and the War of Spanish Succession, 1702–13), sold its debt to the South Sea Company. Holders of government bonds now found themselves holding shares in that company. The attraction of the scheme for investors was that government bonds were not readily transferable, whereas shares in the South Sea Company were. However, there was a considerable delay before people and institutions holding government bonds were able to take possession of their South Sea Company shares.

The massive increase in the number of shares (there were new share issues as well as the shares issued to government creditors) led to an enthusiasm for the new scheme and competition to buy them which drove up the price. The new share issues were paid for in instalments, which might have appeared to offer incentives to smaller investors, but in reality many of the investors were very wealthy people (Hoppit, 2002, p. 150). The smaller investors were mainly people who had

involuntarily exchanged shares by being holders of government bonds and annuities.

Online session 21.2

Now go to the module website and complete online session 21.2. This should take around an hour and 30 minutes.

As you have learned in the online session about the South Sea Bubble, much more publicity was given to those who lost money in the scheme (many of whom did not discover the extent of their losses until many months later) than to those who profited. Many of those who paid for their shares in instalments were, like the purchasers of tulip bulbs in the 1630s, tied in by contract to pay much more than their purchase was worth by the time the final instalment was due.

The South Sea Company's own publicity was less concerned with promoting investment in the company to gain dividend income than with the rise in the value of the shares (Hoppit, 2002, p. 143). Those who understood this, and understood the importance of timing, could make a large profit. Sarah Churchill, Duchess of Marlborough (1660–1744), who had over £30,000-worth of South Sea Company stock in 1717, sold it in May and June 1720, making a profit of over £100,000, some of which she then lent to others to buy shares, later obliging them to honour their debts to her after the stock had fallen in price (Harris, 1991, pp. 227–9). The family who owned Hoare's Bank made over £28,000 profit (Temin and Voth, 2004, p. 1654). Lady Betty Hastings (1682–1739), a wealthy Yorkshire spinster, made several thousand pounds, though it is difficult to calculate the exact extent of her profit (Laurence, 2006, p. 255). Newspapers took a close interest in reporting fortunes made by lesser individuals. One noted that Mr Friend, a clergyman in Hitchin, made £20,000 (*Original Weekly Journal*, 2 April 1720, p. 1705). It later reported that 'a certain Widow Lady ... hath ... trebled the Numbers of her Servants, cloathed the Naked, fed the Hungary [sic], and sent the Rich (who came to Pledge their Jewels with her) empty away; and that her Goodness and Charity rise every Day in proportion to the Stocks' (*Original Weekly Journal*, 2 July 1720, p. 1786). The widow lady had declined (presumably because she had already made so much money) to lend money to women on the

security of their jewels so that they could buy South Sea stock. While the newspapers reported these pieces of good fortune in much the way that the modern media report on winners in the EuroMillions lottery, little sympathy was expended on those who had made fortunes as traders (stock-jobbers), who were subject to the same kind of invective as bankers in the aftermath of the 2008 crisis. All this was meat and drink to satirists, exemplified by popular cartoons, including those that appeared on South Sea Bubble playing cards issued at the time (Figures 21.6 and 21.7).



Figure 21.6 Three of diamonds card from the pack of South Sea Bubble playing cards, 1720. Kress Collection, Baker Library, Harvard University, USA. Photo: Harvard Business School.

In London, dealers in stock had been ‘so enrich’d ... that we hear above fifty new coaches have been set up in the Town’, while in Hyde Park ‘the Mob insulted all those in new Coaches, with the cry of South Sea stock, Stock-Jobbers &c’, a demonstration that was repeated when the carriage riders were hissed and pelted with fruit (*Original Weekly Journal*, 2 April 1720, p. 1705; 9 April 1720, p. 1712; 9 July 1720, p. 1793). It was also reported that over 4,000 embroidered coats and 3,000 gold watches had been ordered, and about 2,000 tradesmen were

ruined when these could not be paid for (*Original Weekly Journal*, 9 July 1720, p. 1792).

Moralists such as George Berkeley (1685–1753) fumed against the stock market because of its similarity to gambling. His censures were in many ways similar to the attacks on luxury discussed in Chapter 20.



Figure 21.7 Five of hearts card from the pack of South Sea Bubble playing cards, 1720. Kress Collection, Baker Library, Harvard University, USA. Photo: Harvard Business School.

Exercise 21.3

Turn to Reading 21.4, George Berkeley, *An Essay Towards Preventing the Ruine of Great Britain* (1721), located at the end of the chapter.

After you have read this, consider the following question:

- What reasons did Berkeley offer for objecting to the new ways of making money?

This should take around 10 minutes.

Discussion

Berkeley was convinced that making money from anything other than productive labour and industry was 'direct Gaming'. He saw wealth separated from virtue: the undeserving making fortunes and the deserving losing them. His views were very similar to those of Martín González de Cellorigo 120 years earlier, which you considered in Reading 21.1.

But was the South Sea Bubble an outrageous swindle on the public from which a few dishonest people made fortunes at the expense of the respectable? Undoubtedly bribery was employed to secure political support in 1718 and 1719 for the South Sea Company to take over the government's debt (rather than another company; the Bank of England was also a candidate). There was insider trading (a concept that would have been incomprehensible in the eighteenth century, when political and economic relations ran on the possession of privileged information). There were unintended consequences such as what is now known as contagion in the markets, where the movement of share prices in one company is mirrored by the prices of other stock. Figure 21.8 shows how the prices of stock in the East India Company and Bank of England, the other main companies whose shares were traded, also rose and fell in 1720, though to nothing like the same extent as those in the South Sea Company.

Eighty-seven petitions were submitted to Parliament in the period December 1720–July 1721 complaining about the crisis and asking that the South Sea Company directors be punished. Their conspicuous consumption was a special grievance for those who had lost money. Parliament took the complaints against the directors and stock-jobbers seriously (partly because many MPs had lost money). Parliament's committee of enquiry required all the directors at the time of the crash to provide an inventory of their possessions. The South Seas Sufferers' Bill required the forfeiture of a proportion of the directors' property to provide compensation. Directors who were MPs were expelled from the House of Commons (Speck and Kilburn, n.d.).

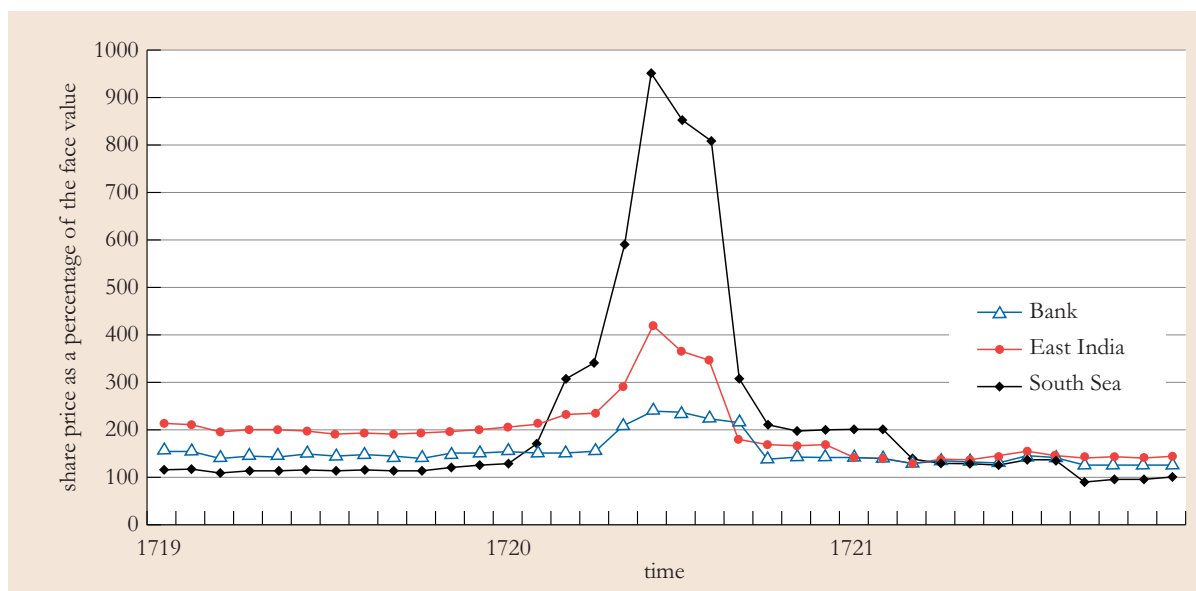


Figure 21.8 Prices of South Sea Company, East India Company and Bank of England stock 1719–21, from Julian Hoppit (2002) 'The myths of the South Sea Bubble', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, volume 12, p. 144, Figure 1; calculated from Larry D. Neal (1990) *The Rise of Financial Capitalism: International Capital Markets in the Age of Reason*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, Appendix, p. 234.

Julian Hoppit has argued that the effects of the collapse in the share prices of 1720 should not be exaggerated: there was no collapse in land prices (South Sea Bubble fortunes were supposedly being used to buy landed estates and when the price of the stock collapsed they had to be sold hurriedly at a loss). Nor was there a significant increase in bankruptcies (Hoppit, 2002, pp. 152, 153). There was, however, an increase in the number of suicides in London as reported in the London Bills of Mortality (from 27 in 1720 to 52 in 1721), though we cannot know for certain whether this increase was among people who had lost fortunes in the South Sea Bubble (MacDonald and Murphy, 1990, p. 267).

It is often suggested that the South Sea Bubble was an episode that introduced hundreds of members of the public to the stock market, a democratisation of the population of shareholders comparable to that of the sales of shares in UK utility companies when they were privatised in the 1980s. Undoubtedly individuals who had not previously ventured into such enterprises were introduced to the stock market, often unwittingly as they had owned what seemed to be secure government bonds or annuities. It was these people who suffered most financially. Their shares became available for sale only in

December 1720, long after the crash in prices, though most of these people's shares had been issued when the price was rising and were valued on that basis (Hoppit, 2002, p. 148). There were four issues of shares for sale, though the purchasers of the shares in the first three issues seem to have been largely the cronies of the South Sea Company directors and the government. These shares were paid for in instalments, so many investors, especially those buying the earlier issues, had to pay several instalments even after the price started to fall. Once the price crashed, the company was less likely to try to get payments of instalments due from people who had bought the later issues (Paul, 2011, p. 83).

How do the examples of the Darien disaster and the South Sea Bubble illustrate or contradict the arguments of Adam Smith and John Brewer? The sale of shares in the Company of Scotland seems to have taken place within a fairly small group of landed and professional people (at the time Scotland had a total population of around 1 million). Scotland's government proved unequal to supporting the failure of the company and the losses investors sustained. The tax revenues collected by the Scottish government were proportionately less than those that the English government collected, but it did not have to support a foreign policy; William III's armies fighting on the continent were paid for by England.

Although the South Sea Bubble may well have increased the number of people involved in the stock market in Britain, the directors and government ministers were a close-knit group of people, bound by common financial and political interests. A number of historians have argued that, large though people's losses were, the crash did not lead to an overall financial collapse and that Britain continued to be able to fund its foreign wars, its capacity to raise money being strengthened by the legislation that followed the South Sea Bubble in order to make financial markets less liable to the ambitions of individual company directors.

Conclusion

What was different about the financial world of 1780 compared with that of 1500? What were people and organisations able to do in 1780 that they had been unable to do in 1500? For some historians the extent of the change, especially during the period 1688–1723 in England, amounted to a financial revolution. Although the political leaders of most European countries continued to rely on territorial power, that is to say on their landed estates, increasingly there emerged a class of people of comparable wealth who had no landed holdings to speak of but who commanded great riches through their investments. Such people became considerable figures for governments to negotiate with.

Another significant change to take place between 1500 and 1780 is the growing extent to which European populations were taxed, and the increasing proportion of the population liable to tax. One calculation is that in 1509 the average European power exacted taxes at 3.5 times the average urban worker's daily wage, while in 1789 this had risen to 12 times that wage (Drelichman and Voth, 2014, p. 28).

In 1500 joint-stock companies did not exist, but there were moneyed corporations: for example the church (which one might call a quasi-state since the Catholic Church and, later, various Protestant churches had the right to levy tithes, an annual tax on income of 10 per cent); religious houses (monasteries and nunneries); guilds; cities; universities; and bodies such as the Royal College of Physicians. All of these corporations derived income from land (which was leased to produce income). Another form of shared ownership was the financing of ships' voyages where, by dividing the value of a ship or its cargo into 64 parts, the risk for its owners was spread. By the end of the period, many of these forms of providing joint finance had been overtaken by joint-stock companies, insurance companies and banks: formally constituted bodies with powers defined in law in which corporate ownership or participation spread the risks of losses among a wide group of people. By 1780, although companies might not have rivalled states in terms of their wealth, they were deeply involved in state activity. For example, the East India Company was governing India.

Let us return to Adam Smith and John Brewer and consider whether the main ideas with which they are associated – Smith's impersonal market and Brewer's argument that the success of the state in raising

money was not its capacity to raise loans but its greater capacity to tax people – seem to be supported by what you have read and heard.

Until the late seventeenth century money was essentially transferred and invested through personal relationships. Loans of money were made from one individual to another. Bankers were individual business people rather than firms with employees. Transactions depended on the presence of trust between two individuals. Smith coined the concept of the impersonal market in which every individual seeks their own advantage, with no regard for the welfare of others. In such a scheme, the market operates at its maximum efficiency unfettered by the restraints of personal relationships. Such a market was created during the seventeenth century through the arrival of government bonds and joint-stock companies into which people and institutions could place their money, making rational decisions about the worth of their investments. Of course, it wasn't that simple. Although you could, in the early eighteenth century, go to Jonathan's Coffee House in Exchange Alley in London and buy and sell stock, many people used an intermediary, either a stock-jobber or a bank.

Looking at evidence such as the material on tulipmania makes it clear that while the market in a theoretical sense might have been impersonal, those who dealt in it conducted their business through very personal relationships. The numerous private individuals who bought and sold shares in the early eighteenth century did so through trusted intermediaries. Information about investments and their valuation was shared within narrow circles of people who were related by blood or who were business or political associates. So while, in theory, Smith was right to note increasing separation between markets and individuals, supposedly creating something that was morally neutral, rational and impersonal, in reality many people taking part in the market relied heavily on relations of trust in the individuals with whom they dealt. Purchases of stock in companies were often related to political allegiance and many private investors invested only in one company (Carlos et al., 2015; Laurence, 2006; Carruthers, 1999).

So what about Brewer's military fiscal state? It is certainly clear that the British state developed effective tax-raising powers and, after the debacle of the South Sea Bubble, also managed to establish effective ways of supporting government debt (as you may see from the amount of war there was in the later eighteenth century).

Finally, you have read two successive chapters each of which explores claims that the changes discussed amounted to a revolution. Certainly the money made by individuals who took advantage of early eighteenth-century investment opportunities allowed them to consume more and to buy luxury goods. Excesses of consumption were often associated in satire with ill-gotten gains. But the financial revolution was really about long-term institutional changes and the early development of capitalist financial relationships.

This chapter has touched on several of the module themes. It has suggested that by the early eighteenth century society and the social order were beginning to change, moving away from a society of hierarchical orders in which land, status and wealth were synonymous and normally came by birth, towards one in which individuals could make large amounts of money through the financial markets. It has suggested that this capacity to make money by investing was disapproved of by moralists because it separated reward from work. And finally, it has suggested the development of a whole new set of ideas in the science of economics.

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Readings

Reading 21.1 Martín González de Cellorigo 'The restoration of the republic'

Source: De Cellorigo, M.G. 'The restoration of the republic' (1600), quoted in Cowans, J. (ed.) (2003), *Early Modern Spain: a Documentary History*, Philadelphia, PA, University of Pennsylvania Press, pp. 133–7.

[De Cellorigo was a government official commenting on the nature and reasons for Spain's decline. His *Memorial de la política necesaria y útil restauración a la república de España y estados de ella, y del desempeño univereal de estos Reynos* was originally published in 1600.]

Spain has always been considered a fertile and abundant land, and it is, for all who seek to enjoy its fertility while recognising that human effort must do its part....What is most certain is that our republic has declined so greatly from its former state because we have disregarded natural laws which teach us to work, and because we have put wealth, which is acquired through natural and human industry, into gold and silver, and because we have ceased to follow the true and right path. It is Spain's subjects who are seriously guilty of this, all the more in these days in which they are fortunate to have a prince and a lord who...is so solicitous of his subjects' welfare...

[p. 134]

The decline in population, which has been perceived for many years in this realm, did not arise so much from wars as from the shortcomings in all things caused by the laziness of our people...With people having put their wealth into gold and silver and into making loans that pay interest, it is as if a general epidemic had thrown this kingdom into misery by persuading all, or most, to live off this money...because in relying on these payments they have abandoned the virtuous occupations of farming and raising animals and all those things that naturally sustain men...So that one can indeed say that the wealth that was supposed to have enriched has instead impoverished...

[p. 135]

Spain has turned its eyes so completely towards the Indies, from which gold and silver is coming, that the kingdom's communications with its neighbors have stopped, and if all the gold and silver that its natives have found and are finding in the New World were to enter here, it

would not make Spain as rich and powerful as it would have been without it....

It is fate that gold and silver be taken out of Spain, and that this kingdom only holds temporarily the wealth that it soon returns to other kingdoms, who are like lords over it....It is a very false opinion held by those who claim that the poverty of this kingdom has arisen because of money leaving it through the wars in Flanders and other states belonging to the crown of Castile. [p. 136]

[p. 137]

Reading 21.2 Announcement in *Flying Post or The Post Master*, 20–22 April 1699

Source: *Flying Post or The Post Master*, April 20, 1699 – April 22, 1699, issue 615, London, 17th–18th Century Burney Collection Newspapers.

The Directors of the Company of *Scotland*, trading to *Africa* and the *Indies*, have given Notice to the Subscribers to pay in 5 *per Cent.* for every Hundred Pounds subscribed against Wednesday next, for buying and equipping Ships, and furnishing Men, Provisions, Stores, and other Necessaries for their Colony at *Darien*.

The said Company have also given Publick Advertisements, That those who have a Mind to transport themselves to *Darien* for their Service, shall give in a List of their Names, Ages, &c. and whether Married or Unmarried, that the Directors may chuse such as they think fittest for their purpose, and give Directions for their Transportation. There being a Horse-Race at *Cowper* on the 11th, where diverse of the Nobility were present, and the News of the safe arrival of the African Companys Ships at *Darien*, coming at the same time, the Nobility, Gentry and Town Council made Publick Rejoycings, drank the King's Health, and the Companies Prosperity, and the Evening concluded with Firing of Guns, Illuminations, Ringing of Bells, &c.

Reading 21.3 William III's letter to Parliament

Source: *Flying Post or The Post Master*, November 2, 1700 – November 5, 1700, issue 857, London, 17th–18th Century Burney Collection Newspapers.

'Tis truly Our Regret that, We could not agree to the asserting of the Right of the Companies Collony in *Darien*, and you may be very confident, if it had not been for invincible Reasons, the pressing Desires of all our Ministers, with the Inclination of Our good Subjects therein concerned, had undoubtedly prevailed, but since We were and are fully satisfied, that Our yielding in that Matter, had infallibly disturbed the general Peace of Christendom, and brought inevitably upon that Our Ancient Kingdom a heavy War, wherein We could expect no Assistance; and that now the State of that Affair is quite altered, We doubt not but you will rest satisfied with these plain Reasons.

We are heartily sorry for the Company's Loss in what hath happened, but we being most willing that the Company's Losses be repaired, and ready to concur in any new Project or Design that shall be reasonably proposed for the Good and Advantage of the Kingdom, We are most confident, the Wisdom of the Parliament will no longer stop upon this Obstruction: Having then this happy Opportunity for the promoting of the Good and Welfare of the Kingdom, you will certainly lay hold upon it. ...'

Reading 21.4 George Berkeley, *An Essay Towards Preventing the Ruine of Great Britain*

Source: Berkeley, G. (1721) *An Essay Towards Preventing the Ruine of Great Britain*, London, pp. 5–6.

[George Berkeley (1685–1753) was a Church of Ireland clergyman, but his interests extended far beyond the church, into mathematics and philosophy. He published this essay following the South Sea Bubble. He is best remembered now as a philosopher.]

Industry is the natural sure way to Wealth. This is so true, that it is impossible an industrious free People should want the Necessaries and Comforts of Life, or an idle enjoy them under any form of Government. Money is so far useful to the Public, as it promoteth Industry; and Credit having the same effect, is of the same value with

Money. But Money or Credit circulating through a Nation from Hand to Hand, without producing Labour and Industry in the Inhabitants, is direct Gaming.

It is not impossible for cunning Men to make such plausible Schemes, as may draw those who are less skilful into their own and the public Ruin. But surely, there is no Man of Sense and Honesty but must see and own, whether he understands the Game or not, that it is an evident Folly for any People, instead of prosecuting the old honest methods of Industry and Frugality, to sit down to a public Gaming Table, and play off their Money one to another.

The more Methods there are in a State for acquiring Riches without Industry or Merit, the less there will be of either in that State. This is as evident as the Ruin that attends it. Besides, when Money is shifted from Hand to Hand in such a blind fortuitous manner, that some Men shall from nothing in an instant acquire vast Estates without the least desert: while others are as suddenly stript of plentiful Fortunes, and left on the Parish by their own Avarice and Credulity: what can be hoped for on the one hand, but abandoned Luxury and Wantonness; or on the other, but extream Madness and Despair?

[p. 6]

In short, all Projects for growing rich by sudden and extraordinary methods, as they operate violently on the Passions of Men, and encourage them to despise the slow moderate Gains that are to be made by an honest Industry, must be ruinous to the Public; and even the Winners themselves will at length be involved in the Public Ruine.

Chapter 22 Old and new knowledge

Silvia De Renzi

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Learning outcomes

By the end of this chapter you should be able to:

- explain how the study of nature changed between the late sixteenth and eighteenth centuries
- appreciate how old and new ideas intertwined and coexisted in this period
- explain the uses of astrology in early modern society, and its demise
- account for the changes in expertise over childbirth.

Introduction

One of the most significant features of the early modern period is that knowledge, especially natural knowledge, was transformed. Starting in the mid-sixteenth century, this process peaked in the seventeenth century in what is known as the ‘Scientific Revolution’. You have encountered this briefly in the chapters that introduced Books 1 and Book 3: ‘Early modern Europe: an introduction’ (Chapter 1) and ‘Broader horizons’ (Chapter 17). Historians agree that this revolution paved the way for the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, when new ideas about nature, but also about humankind and society, spread across Europe. This chapter discusses some aspects of the Scientific Revolution and its consequences, and does so by focusing on matters related to the theme of bodies, health and disease that you have examined in the chapters ‘Bodies, life cycles and illness’ (Chapter 4) in Book 1 and ‘Responding to disease’ (Chapter 11) in Book 2. It considers the nature of change in two areas that had an important impact on people’s lives.

First you will examine astrology, a centuries-old set of ideas based on the assumption that heavenly bodies like planets influence what happens on the earth. Identifying their positions and movements allowed people to predict this influence and so forecast the future, from how individual lives would unfold to large-scale events like the weather and political upheaval. In Chapter 11 you read that outbreaks of epidemics were commonly understood as the consequence of malign conjunctions of planets or of comets. Some of you will regard this as irrational, but at the turn of the twentieth-first century between 20 per cent and 50 per cent of European, North American and Asian people believed mildly or strongly in astrology (Curth, 2007, p. 105); indeed some of you may yourselves have an object like a mug decorated with your zodiac sign, or may follow your horoscope. However, in the early modern period astrology, like religion, provided learned and ordinary people alike with a fundamental framework for explaining many events while perhaps giving them the sense of some control over life’s unpredictability. You are encouraged to suspend your judgement and focus on making sense of the meaning and uses of astrology in early modern society. By the eighteenth century astrology was increasingly regarded as old and superstitious knowledge – but, as you will read, this loss of clout was not a straightforward process.

You will then examine childbirth. As you know from Chapter 4, early modern midwives were in charge of delivering babies. However, by the mid-eighteenth century medical men started to claim this as their remit, criticising midwives' knowledge as ill-founded and dangerous.

Gradually, and in very different ways across Europe, 'proper' medical knowledge entered the birthing room, sometimes dramatically changing how gender relationships developed there. For a long time, historians have explained this as an episode in the history of the triumph of rationality associated with the Enlightenment, but you will examine some more recent interpretations, partly prompted by today's controversies over the medicalisation of childbirth.

At first glance astrology and childbirth have little in common.

However, their history illustrates how widely accepted knowledge came to be seen – after the Scientific Revolution and increasingly in the eighteenth century – as 'old' and superstitious and in need of reform. You will examine various questions related to how intellectual change unfolded: how swiftly did the new knowledge replace the old? Should we understand this process as the inevitable advance of rationality led by the outstanding minds of (mainly male) scientists? As you will see, current research in the history of science and medicine is increasingly seeking to explain changes in knowledge and ideas less as the outcome of solitary minds (the 'heroes of science' approach) and more as part of broader social and political processes.

22.1 A new approach to nature

To start examining the issues outlined in the introduction, let us have a closer look at what is traditionally called the Scientific Revolution.

Exercise 22.1

Turn to Claudia Stein, 'The Scientific Revolution' in the set book and read pages 204–13. Read this twice; the first time just make a list of the key characters introduced here, along with what they are famous for. Then read the chapter again and answer the following question:

- What were the main features of the new approach to nature fostered by the Scientific Revolution?

This should take around an hour and 15 minutes.

Discussion

After a first reading, my list includes the following:

- Nicolaus Copernicus (1473–1543) and his heliocentric view of the cosmos in which the sun is at the centre of a system of planets, including the earth, which revolve around it
- Andreas Vesalius (1514–1564) and his *De humani corporis fabrica*, where dissection and accurate illustrations are the basis of new anatomical knowledge
- William Harvey (1578–1657) and his idea that blood circulates in the vessels
- Galileo Galilei (1564–1642) and his astronomical observations which helped substantiate the Copernican theory
- René Descartes (1596–1650) and the mechanical model he introduced to explain a range of natural phenomena
- Isaac Newton (1643–1727) and his ideas about the force of gravity and the laws of motion.

After a second reading, you may have identified the following characteristics: the use of mathematics and measurement to understand natural phenomena; the greater ease with which traditional authorities were challenged; the growing importance of observations and personal experience as the source of knowledge; the emergence of experiments designed to discover the main laws in nature.

In her chapter in the set book Stein focuses on the most innovative ideas and who promoted them, and this is an essential step in any historical understanding of the Scientific Revolution. But knowing the content of new ideas does not explain what impact, if any, they had on society at large. Take anatomy, which was one of the areas transformed by the new emphasis on observation (Figure 22.1). Yet, to what extent the new anatomy changed medicine is open to discussion. On the one hand, systematic anatomical investigations led to a new understanding of the body. Harvey's theory of the blood circulation highlighted the function of the heart. The mechanical approach to nature proposed by Descartes meant that organs were now explained as machines, for example kidneys were seen as filtering particles of blood. Instruments like the microscope made it possible to observe the finest details of the body, as shown in Figure 22.2. On the other hand, the major tenets of the humoral medical tradition remained unchallenged; well into the eighteenth century, if you were sick you would be prescribed bloodletting and purges. The relationships between anatomy and medicine are a good illustration of the complex interactions between novelty and tradition as well as between ideas and society.



Figure 22.1 Andries Stock, after a drawing by Jacques de Gheyn II, *An Anatomical Dissection by Pieter Pauw in the Leiden Anatomy Theatre*, 1615, engraving, 28 x 22 cm. Wellcome Library, London. Copyrighted work available under Creative Commons Attribution only licence CC BY 4.0 <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>. This engraving of a dissection was included in a book by Dutch physician Pieter Pauw. It is a carefully staged scene and not a snapshot of the anatomical theatre in Leiden where he worked. Yet it testifies to the new practice of anatomical observations and its growing popularity.

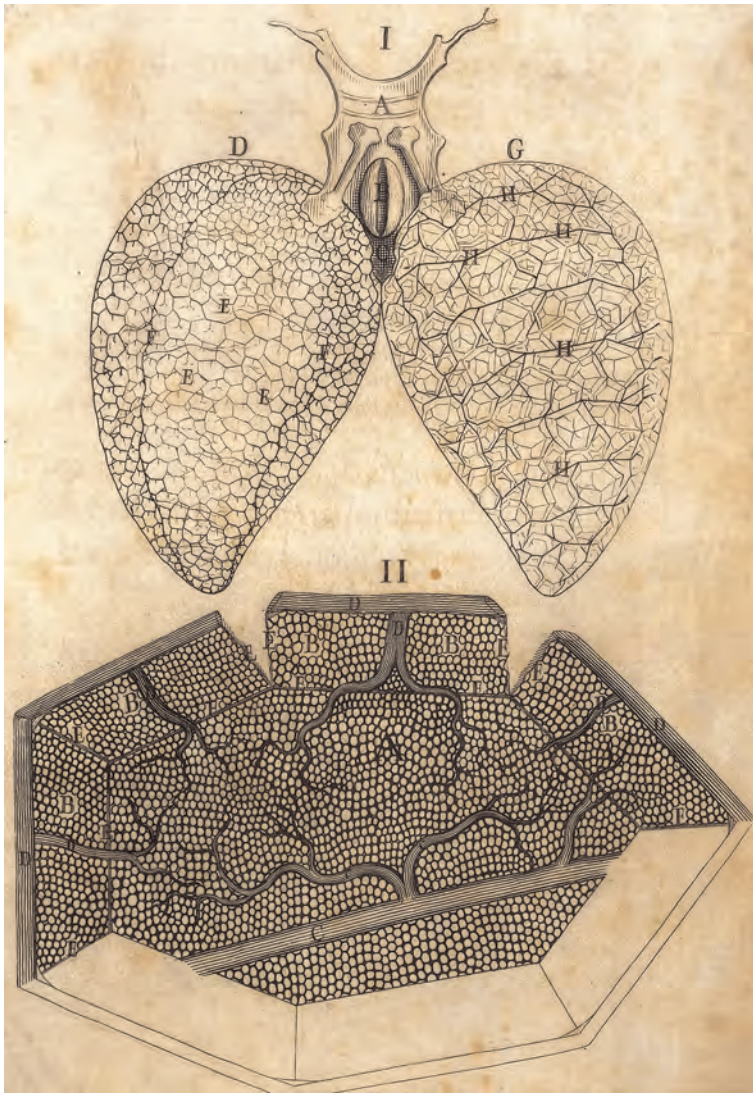


Figure 22.2 'The Lungs and capillaries', engraving, from *De pulmonibus observationes anatomicae* ('Anatomical Observations of the Lungs') by the Italian anatomist Marcello Malpighi, published in 1661. It made visible for the first time the lungs' most minute structures as seen through a microscope, as well as the connections of veins and arteries that supported Harvey's circulatory model. Wellcome Library, London. Copyrighted work available under Creative Commons Attribution only licence CC BY 4.0 <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.

22.2 Between heaven and the earth

As you read in the set book, the other area in which the new approach to nature had the greatest consequences was astronomy. Since ancient times people had believed that the astral bodies were made of a unique substance called ether. As you can see from Figure 22.3, they were thought to move around the earth along concentric, solid spheres made of a crystalline matter. Their movement was constant and nothing in this part of the cosmos could change. The furthest away from the earth was the sphere of the fixed stars; the closest was the sphere of the moon (here indicated as ‘la lune’). The area between the moon and the earth, and the earth itself, were very different from the rest of the heavens: here change could occur in the form of meteorological events, but also by ageing and decaying. Comets moved bizarrely and had a strange shape, so they were thought to be below the sphere of the moon. According to this traditional view, both comets and planets could affect life on earth. As a new understanding of the universe was proposed, astronomical observations demonstrated that celestial bodies like the sun are, just like the earth, made of irregular matter, not of ether. Could astrological ideas and practice survive these momentous transformations in the order and status of the celestial bodies?

It is the stars,
The stars above us, govern our conditions

(Kent in *King Lear*, Act IV, scene 3, lines 36–7)

With these two lines, Shakespeare forcefully expressed the belief of his contemporaries in the power of the stars. This is how renowned physician Girolamo Cardano (1501–1576) praised astrology in 1554:

Nothing comes closer to human happiness than knowing and understanding those things which nature has enclosed within her secrets. Nothing is more noble and excellent than understanding and pondering God’s supreme works. Of all doctrines, astrology, which embraces both of these – the apotheosis of God’s creation in the shape of the machinery of the heavens and the mysterious knowledge of future events – has been unanimously accorded first place by the wise.

(Quoted in Ernst, 1991, p. 252)



Figure 22.3 Unknown artist, cosmological diagram showing earth in centre, planets, habitation of God etc., woodcut from Apianus, P, *Cosmographia .. Gemmam Frisium*, Paris, Gaultherot, 1551. Wellcome Library, London. Copyrighted work available under Creative Commons Attribution only licence CC BY 4.0 <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>. This diagram represents the universe according to ancient theories: at the centre is the earth, surrounded by the crystalline spheres of the planets, including the sun (here indicated in French as 'le soleil').



Figure 22.4 Unknown French(?) engraver, *The Planets and Signs of the Zodiac Send down Their Influence on to the Body of a Man on Earth*, seventeenth century, engraving, 24 x 16 cm. Wellcome Library, London. Copyrighted work available under Creative Commons Attribution only licence CC BY 4.0 <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.

While urging people to appreciate God's creation in the complex harmony of the heavens, astrology allegedly enabled them to know things to come, and these were the reasons for its pre-eminence.

Stars were thought to 'govern our conditions' because as they circle around the earth celestial bodies (including the more unusual comets) were thought to radiate a material force which, depending on their relative position, could be either beneficial or malignant to life.

Figure 22.4 illustrates how this was understood.

Because they move, the celestial bodies were thought to affect various locations on earth differently. Ordinary patterns of weather, but also catastrophic phenomena like earthquakes, floods and epidemics, were explained as the result of these forces. Some alignments of planets and exceptional astronomical phenomena were also thought to prefigure and, according to some, cause crucial events in history, for example the succession of rulers, religious upheaval or wars, as Figure 22.5 shows.

Another widespread assumption was that nature is interconnected and a symmetry exists between the macrocosm, that is, the universe, and the microcosm, the smaller-scale natural world, down to the human body. Celestial influence was supposed to tie everything together and so, for example, planets ruled over humours, the main constituents of bodies. The moon and Saturn were the coldest bodies and, according to this principle of correspondence, they affected the coldest of the humours, black bile. Its abundance, as you read in Chapter 4, was thought to cause melancholy, sadness and erratic behaviour. The astrological roots of the word 'lunatic' will now be clear to you.

Cosmic influence was considered particularly important at the time of conception and birth; rulers were known to plan sexual intercourse to maximise the beneficial influence of planets on their offspring (Siraisi, 1990, p. 111). When a child was born, it was standard practice to cast a horoscope charting the position of celestial bodies at the time, as Figure 22.6 illustrates. The important Protestant leader Philip Melancthon (1497–1560) is known to have ordered and discussed his daughters' horoscopes (Hübner, 2014, p. 36). A horoscope allegedly revealed much about a child's future, but this involved precise calculations – nothing like today's horoscopes in the newspaper where a one-size-fits-all prediction accompanies each zodiacal sign.



Figure 22.5 Unknown artist, scenes at Groningen and Wien, engraving, from Brinckmair, L, *The vvarnings of germany. By wonderfvll signes, and strange Prodigies seene in divers parts of that Countrey of Germany, betweene the Yeare 1618 and 1638. Together with a briefe relation of the miserable Events which ensued*, published London, J Norton and J Rothwell, 1638. British Library, London, G.6313. Photo: © The British Library Board. Prodigious astronomical phenomena were read as omens of forthcoming violence and destruction, as in this image in a book published in the middle of the Thirty Years' War, which shows the appearance of a comet and of three suns surrounded by rainbows in some of the places affected by the war.



Figure 22.6 *Birthing Scene*, woodcut from Jacob Ruyff, *De conceptu et generatione hominis* ..., 1580, Frankfurt, Germany. Wellcome Library, London. Copyrighted work available under Creative Commons Attribution only licence CC BY 4.0 <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>. This woodcut appears in a book on human conception and generation. While a woman is in labour, two men are looking at the stars and plotting a horoscope for the child.

Astrology was closely related to astronomy. One may say that astrology was the practical side of the theoretical and mathematical understanding of the sky that interested astronomers. Astrologers relied for their predictions on the tables produced by mathematicians and astronomers. Remarkably, astronomers famous for their observations and innovative views, for example Tycho Brahe (1546–1601) or Johannes Kepler (1571–1630), doubled as court astrologers; in

England, the mathematician John Dee (1527–1608) advised Elizabeth I (1533–1603, reigned 1558–1603) on the most propitious day for her coronation. Astrology was not just court business, but a feature of more ordinary lives too. Some astrologers provided an individual service, attracting hundreds of clients with questions about future wealth and success, or asking for advice about when to get married or start a journey. Many of the queries, however, related to health. Englishmen Simon Forman (1552–1611) and Richard Napier (1559–1634) were astrologers and medical practitioners who used astrological charts to treat their clients.

Online session 22.1

Now go to the module website and complete online session 22.1. This should take around an hour.

Astrology in print

Astrological practice often implied a personal relationship between the practitioner and his client, but astrologers also communicated to the public through print. The sheer volume of astrological publications held in libraries across Europe has been one of the factors persuading historians to take astrology seriously. These publications varied in authorship, genre and cost, from the simple predictions of astrologers who peddled their booklets in town squares (just like the charlatans you have studied in Chapter 11) or the cheap almanacs churned out by printers across Europe, to learned publications prophesising major events and the eagerly anticipated prognostications compiled yearly by university-based astrologers (Casali, 2003).

Exercise 22.2

Turn to Reading 22.1, 'Predicting the future in the Renaissance: Girolamo Cardano' (1999), located at the end of the chapter. This is a short summary which Anthony Grafton has produced of the *Pronostico* published in 1534 by Cardano (the physician whose celebration of astrology you read earlier).

After you have read this, answer the following questions:

- To what 'loss of faith' was Cardano referring?
- What other information did he include?

This should take around 10 minutes.

Discussion

Writing in 1534, Cardano had in mind the Protestant Reformation that in Catholic countries like Italy was seen as a major calamity. Cardano partly explained this as the result of bad celestial alignment. You may have noticed that he foresaw big problems for political rulers, but he also included short-term predictions about the weather, some of which were very precise. These, as Grafton stresses, would have been useful to farmers and doctors.

Astrological tracts could have a strong prophetic strand and so feed the political debate of the time: predictions that celestial movements would cause wars, death of kings or other upheavals alarmed and excited readers. In 1583, for example, Richard Harvey's *An Astrological Discourse upon the Coniunction of Saturne & Iupiter* concluded: 'it is vehemently to be feared, that in the East and Southeast cuntries [sic], a desperate company of vile and villanous rascals shall flocke together, and seditiously, rebelliously, and traitorously arise in the armes against their Princes and Magistrates' (quoted in Vanden Broecke, 2014, p. 219). You may remember from the chapter 'Popular action: ritual, protest and riot' (Chapter 16) in Book 2 that popular protest included sudden and violent unrest such as the one feared here. The period of the civil wars in Britain saw an unprecedented surge of astrological and prophetic pamphlets from both sides, though most were from the parliamentarians (Curry, 1991, p. 278). Astrology could become a very effective resource for guiding action and taking decisions, and also for political propaganda.

Almanacs were much more ordinary publications. Small booklets that were discarded at the end of the year, they contained astronomical information about the moon and the sun and simple predictions of the weather for specific locations. They also included a variety of useful tips: when to carry out agricultural chores (for instance, land should be manured during the waning of the moon); the distances between

towns; dates of fairs; and information about health – for example a list of the days when bloodletting was to be avoided, or a visual summary of the influence of the moon on different parts of the body, as illustrated in Figure 22.7.



Figure 22.7 ‘The dominion of the Moon in man’s body’, from Jonathan Dove, *An Almanack for the Year of our Lord 1641, Calculated for the Towne of Cambridge*, London, Company of Stationers, 1641. Photo: Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, University of Toronto. Notice that the heart and back were most affected under the sign of Leo in the summer.

Cheap to buy, almanacs were ‘arguably the most popular books of the early modern period’ (Eamon, 2014, p. 163) and testify to the rise of literacy that you have examined in the chapter ‘Literacy, learning and the printed word’ (Chapter 12) in Book 2. As Patrick Curry notes: ‘Illiterate and semi-literate labourers sowed crops, slaughtered animals and even cut hair and nails according to the sign and phase of the Moon. Along with their social superiors, by the 1660s they were buying

an average of 400,000 annual astrological almanacs a year' (Curry, 1991, p. 275). If you were a farmer or a sailor you would have found detailed predictions of the weather very useful, but, with their varied information, almanacs were more generally the 'simple man's treasury of knowledge' (Eamon, 2014, p. 169). For Bernard Capp, printed almanacs were more than that – they helped to transform the 'long tradition of popular lore based on the moon, planets and eclipses' into a 'form that could be widely disseminated through society' (Capp, 1979, p. 283).

Physicians, however, had a more specific interest in the information contained in yearly astrological prognostications. According to the Hippocratic text *Airs, Waters, Places* that you examined as part of your work in Chapter 11, diseases were often associated with the environment, which included the general climate and patterns of weather prevalent in each location. These were understood to depend on astrological influences. Physicians found it helpful to know in advance if a season was to be very cold and wet, or under the influence of certain planets.

Exercise 22.3

Read the following extract and consider the nature of the diseases medical practitioner Nicholas Culpeper (1616–1654) was predicting in his *An Ephemeris for the Year 1655*.

This should take around 5 minutes.

I shall not now be sparing to deliver my Judgement a little for the publique good, what Diseases are like to reign ... And herein *Saturn* being Lord of the Sixth [House], the sign *Capricorn* on the Cusp thereof with the *Moon*, whose detriment is there in Conjunction with *Saturn*, both posited in *Virgo*, tells me, that there will be such a disease in the guts as will puzzle the *College* of Physicians of *London* to cure, or to know the cause ... besides spleenitick [bad tempered] passions of all sorts, both hardness and opilations [blockages], stoppings, and fluxes thereof, with most cruel pains and torments, in so much that of the beginning of a *Cronick* Infirmitie, the end may be very *acute* [W]omen, but especially women of a middle age, or something more, will be

... subject to suppression of their *Menses* ... as also young women will be subject to abortions, and hard labour.

(Culpeper, 1655, pp. 8–9)

Discussion

Culpeper predicted that the position of Saturn would cause a severe disease of the abdomen that would puzzle learned physicians; there would also be a spate of more ordinary diseases ('hardness' and 'opilations' were labels commonly used to define blockage of matter inside the body), and of ailments affecting specific groups identified by sex and age, such as the afflictions of older women and the miscarriages of younger ones. Unlike the personalised predictions produced by Forman, Culpeper's assessment of the year was deemed to be relevant for large groups.

People from all walks of life believed in astrology, and yet in the early modern period it was also the subject of intense debates. The idea that a person's fate is ruled by the stars clashed with the Christian tenet that men and women have free will and their final judgement centres on the decisions they took during their lives. Astrologers' claims to predict people's future looked foolish and arrogant: only God in his prescience has knowledge of things to come. In 1586, at the peak of the Counter-Reformation, the Pope banned astrology and all forms of divination. However, at the core of his ban was a clear distinction between judicial and natural astrology. The former, based on casting horoscopes and predicting very specific human and political events, was illicit; the latter, based on the observations of the skies to predict phenomena like patterns of weather, was regarded as legitimate and useful to a range of human activities such as farming, navigation and medicine (Ernst, 1991, p. 249).

The ban did not reduce astrologers' popularity, but we may wonder if a more serious challenge occurred when new astronomical observations shook the foundations of traditional cosmology. The Copernican system now placed the sun, not the earth, at the centre and some even claimed that the universe was infinite; if the earth was one among many planets revolving around the sun, what happened to the influence of the stars on it?

The demise of astrology

By the mid-eighteenth century astrology had lost its cultural clout and for a long time historians have explained this as a relatively simple process: astrology vanished because the new approach to nature based on observation and measurement could not but triumph over a body of knowledge so obviously linked to old beliefs. In fact astrology did not die overnight; it included wide-ranging activities and beliefs, some of which held sway for longer and were reformed rather than ditched. Evidence of this process is found in the complex attitude towards astrology held by some of the natural philosophers who were instrumental to the success of the Scientific Revolution.

Francis Bacon (1561–1626), for example, was an English philosopher and statesman who proposed to reform natural knowledge beginning from the method with which it was acquired. One of the problems he saw in the traditional approach was that generalisations were made on the basis of a very limited number of observations. He argued that the foundation of better and more certain knowledge was the reiteration of observations and that as many experiences as possible should be collected on every issue under examination. This method of starting with empirical observations rather than general principles is called inductive. He started to gather these observations on a wide range of topics. Bacon was very influential on the subsequent generation of experimental philosophers.

Exercise 22.4

Turn to Reading 22.2, ‘Francis Bacon and the reformation of astrology’ (2006), located at the end of the chapter, and identify Bacon’s approach to astrology.

Keep in mind that a revolution (here used as an astrological term) was a general prediction about the effects of stars on phenomena like weather, famine or wars; a nativity mapped the position of the celestial bodies when a person was born; an election determined the best time to undertake an activity; an interrogation was an astrologer’s response to a specific query based on the situation of the sky at the time it was posed (Eamon, 2014, pp. 154–5).

This should take around 10 minutes.

Discussion

Bacon discarded as ill-founded all the more specific predictions about individual events at precise points of time. But he was keen to reform astrology as the study of the influence of the skies on general natural phenomena, and also on social and political processes. He did not deny such influence but claimed that it should be more precisely assessed, including by paying more attention to the recipients of influence. You may have noticed that the humours and air were considered as more prone to the action of the skies. Finally, Bacon thought that the same method could be applied to astrology that he endorsed more generally for natural investigations: collecting histories and observations as the basis for any generalisation and future prediction.

Historians agree that one of the most important factors that allowed the reform of astrology was the growing separation between judicial and natural astrology and a new approach to the latter. In the late seventeenth century various scholars attended to this reform in earnest. Take John Goad, whose 1686 *Astro-Meteorologica, or Aphorisms and Discourses of the Bodies Celestial, Their Natures and Influences* was based on his meticulous records over many years of weather conditions and how they were associated with astronomical circumstances. So, for example, the correlation between the new moon and rain was established if it rained on at least half of the days in a year when the moon was new (Curry, 1989, pp. 70–1).

You can appreciate that the concept of ‘reforming astrology’ is in tension with the notion of ‘revolution’ in the expression ‘Scientific Revolution’. The term ‘reform’ evokes a gradual process in which ideas and assumptions are reworked, renamed and not rejected altogether. One way in which astrological assumptions were reworked was by making them fit into the new philosophical system that scholars like Newton were proposing. Take Richard Mead (1673–1754), who was a successful eighteenth-century British physician. Mead moved in learned circles, developing a medicine based on Newtonian principles. This meant drawing on mechanical concepts to explain bodily phenomena, for example how gravitational forces act on fluids. Mead argued that lower atmospheric pressure associated with a new or full moon causes the blood and other humours to expand and burst out of the vessels. This accounted for many kinds of bleedings as well as diseases

characterised by swelling. He thought that the same mechanism affects the nervous fluid (which was believed to circulate in the nerves) and this was why epileptic fits and madness increase when the moon is full: Mead claimed to have empirical evidence of this phenomenon. Far from being an eccentric or a backward-looking individual, Mead was a learned and distinguished doctor; his blending of what today may seem contradictory views shows the extent to which old beliefs could be made fully congruent with the newest ideas, for example the mechanical approach endorsed by the new philosophy (Roos, 2000).

Online session 22.2

Now go to the module website and complete online session 22.2. This should take around an hour and a half.

Climate and disease in the eighteenth century

The extract from Culpeper that you read in exercise 22.3 has given you a flavour of how physicians used (and could produce) astrological prognostications. Physicians' attention to what happens between heaven and the earth continued, but, as a new approach to natural phenomena gained favour, their interest shifted to what historians call 'meteorological medicine'. Overall, correlations were no longer sought between planets' influence, weather and diseases, but only between weather and diseases. These correlations were also based on systematic observations made over a long time and with a more quantitative approach to the data.

Among the first to do this was English physician Thomas Sydenham (1624–1689), who regularly recorded the epidemics that occurred in London and encouraged his peers to do the same for their locations. In the early eighteenth century many physicians followed his advice, using purpose-made weather and disease diaries to log their observations. Some of the data were then published, for example in 1759 John Huxham (c.1692–1768) published *Observations on the Air and Epidemic Diseases from the Year [1728] to [1737] Inclusive*, in which this distinguished physician of Plymouth included monthly and annual weather observations with remarks on prevailing diseases. This is a short extract:

1730. June. The prevailing Wind during this Month was the westerly, inclining sometimes to the South, and sometimes to the North. At the Middle and End of June the Atmosphere was very moist. The Barometer never stood remarkably high for the whole month ... All the intermittent Fevers almost quite disappeared in this Month, and there were scarcely any other Complaints, unless of a Faintness and Loss of Strength, which was common to everybody.

(Huxham, 1759, p. 55)

You may have noticed the reference to the barometer, an instrument which had been devised in the mid-seventeenth century to measure atmospheric pressure; Huxham also recorded the amount of rainfall and other meteorological events. Overall, June 1730 seems to have been a healthy month.

The drive to present the collected observations in a clear, quantitative form is illustrated in a work of 1767 by Frenchman Jean Razoux (1723–1798), *Tables nosologiques et météorologiques ... depuis ... Juin 1757 jusques au ... Janv. 1762* ('Nosological and meteorological tables ... from ... June 1757 to ... January 1762'). Keep in mind that nosology was the study of diseases that aimed at their classification. Here for each month Razoux produced a table recording daily barometer and thermometer readings, wind direction and the 'status of the sky' in his home town of Nîmes, with a corresponding table noting the prevalence of different kinds of disease, which included the number of hospital patients suffering from each one and, of these, the number of those who recovered, died, or were convalescent (Rusnock, 2002, pp. 130–1).

Eighteenth-century medicine was characterised, like many other areas of knowledge, by an increasingly collective effort to gain and circulate practical, useful information. As you will explore in the chapter 'Ideas and the Enlightenment' (Chapter 23), one of the chief tenets of the Enlightenment was that knowledge could drive social and economic improvement and should be shared. A great variety of publications disseminating technical knowledge flooded the market. Starting in the late seventeenth century, European scholars and natural philosophers had established scientific academies where they exchanged ideas and carried out experiments. In the eighteenth century, academies also coordinated the large-scale collection of data from members resident in different locations. One such project was organised by the Société

Royale de Médecine in Paris which in the 1770s urged provincial physicians across France to record and send in their meteorological observations. An efficient network was created, and in the 1780s preprinted forms arranged in columns were circulated to facilitate a uniform collection of data that could be more easily compared (Rusnock, 2002, p. 118).

Eighteenth-century physicians embracing meteorological medicine were keen to measure the phenomena they studied and prove quantitatively the correlations between the weather and health conditions. This was an entirely new pursuit, very different from Culpeper's astrological medicine with its old notion of influence. Yet meteorological medicine was also based on some continuity with the tradition: Hippocrates, the doctor of ancient Greece about whom you read in Chapters 4 and 11, remained eighteenth-century physicians' greatest hero and his interest in the environment was a continuing source of inspiration.

The expression 'Scientific Revolution' conveys the sense of very dramatic and rapid change, but in the picture that this chapter is drawing the boundaries between old and new are fuzzier. You have charted some of the most significant transformations in natural knowledge, but also the more gradual adjustments and subtle repositioning of skills and expectations that occurred as new philosophical and scientific views were accepted. Sometimes these dynamics were more clearly part of broader social and political processes, as you will examine in relation to midwives' competence.

22.3 Giving birth: practice and knowledge

Exercise 22.5

Consider Figure 22.6 again and now pay attention to the clear gender distinction in the room. Then, focusing on the foreground, jot down what you see.

This should take around 5 minutes.

Discussion

You will have noticed that two women are comforting a woman in labour; in front of her another woman (probably a midwife) attends the baby. Despite a sizeable bed, the woman sits on a chair and a number of everyday objects (jugs, dishes) indicate that childbirth was a domestic affair, though I am puzzled by the objects dangling from the midwife's belt.

Analysing images such as Figure 22.6, accounts of childbirth in letters and documents related to midwives' activities, historians have described sixteenth- and seventeenth-century childbirth as an event dominated by female expertise and traditional rituals. Since the Middle Ages, learned physicians had advised couples over conception and infertility, but considerations of modesty meant that they did not normally attend the birthing room. Furthermore, helping a woman deliver her baby involved a manual dexterity that physicians regarded as beneath them. This was where female competence and mutual aid came in as relatives, friends and a midwife cared for a woman in labour.

There was, however, a situation in which male practitioners had access to the birthing room: if the baby was dead, or stuck in the birth canal. Surgeons were then summoned and using hook-shaped instruments grabbed and extracted the baby's body. This meant that men's presence in the birthing room tended to be associated with death and sorrow, not joy.

Midwives

Midwives were among the few early modern women whose expertise was publicly recognised. To practise in the medical system that you have studied in Chapter 11, midwives had to be licensed and take an oath, though of course a large number of women, especially in rural areas, practised midwifery with no official approval. Licences could be issued by a town council or the colleges of physicians, but also by ecclesiastical authorities. Midwives' moral character was important because of the nature of their service and also because they were allowed to perform emergency baptism, an exceptional arrangement given that women could administer no other sacrament; saving souls was extraordinarily important in early modern society. Officially authorised midwives could also be summoned in law courts where they were routinely consulted as expert witnesses in cases pivoting on female bodies, from infanticide (the murder of a newborn baby) to rape or the annulment of a marriage due to infertility. Midwives' work took them into the public space and they provide interesting evidence to gender history.

Exercise 22.6

Turn to Reading 22.3, 'Ordinance regulating midwives, Germany, 1522', located at the end of the chapter. (You have already encountered part of this document in Chapter 1.)

As you read:

- consider which aspects of a midwife's activities the town council of Nuremberg was keen to control and what the document tells us about her training
- try also to read this source against the grain (to remind yourself what this means, go back to the chapter 'Living together' (Chapter 9) in Book 2 and look again at Section 9.4).

This should take around 20 minutes.

Discussion

- The council set a clear code of conduct for midwives. They were to respond promptly and with no favouritism to calls for their services, caring for the women and being ready to summon colleagues' help if things were difficult. The council felt that it had the right to punish rogue midwives, who did not follow the rules or sent their inexperienced 'maids' in their place. There was also a strong interest in midwives' training. Apprentices' loyalty to a senior midwife was encouraged, though it was acknowledged that things might go wrong; midwives in the early stages of their careers had to be supervised. You may have noticed the view that older women with no family would make the best apprentices. Overall the source shows the council's commitment to the quality of the service.
 - Reading this document against the grain, we can conclude that midwives may have been less than zealous in their job, with some of them placing personal gain before professional behaviour. This is an interesting addition to the evidence we gain from Figure 22.6. However, we also have to consider that the members of the council may have exaggerated midwives' bad conduct to reinforce their own position as guardians of women's welfare.
-

Town councils recognised the importance of experienced midwives and this echoes the provision of town doctors you have analysed in Chapter 11. However, midwives' expertise also took them into wealthy households and even royal courts, where they might attend queens. Elite midwives such as the Frenchwoman Louise Bourgeois (1563–1636) were learned, articulate and proud. Bourgeois even published a book on different aspects of her trade: being a female author was at this time an extraordinary achievement.

Physicians' attitude towards midwives was ambivalent: while happy to leave the burden of childbirth to them, they were aware that this could undermine their own authority. Writing in 1578, French doctor Laurent Joubert (1529–1582) claimed:

The arrogance and presumption of some women is such that they think they understand more about conditions proper to women ... than the most competent physicians in the world ... in a well-governed realm, physicians need to teach midwives the anatomy

of the organs harboring the child ... Because of this ignorance, most of these women become arrogant and presumptuous, even extremely so if they have even served some great lady. ... This causes them to become haughty.

(Joubert, 1989 [1578], pp. 172–3)

You may have noticed the attack on elite midwives, who could become ‘haughty’.

Changes in the birthing room

By the mid-eighteenth century, especially in England, a rather surprising trend had developed, as male practitioners started to attend the birthing room much more routinely, including during normal deliveries and following agreements made with families beforehand. By the end of the century ‘it is possible that in some parts of England half of the deliveries were attended by men’ (Harley, 1993, p. 43). A new word was coined to define these practitioners: ‘men-midwives’. The word betrays the unusual status of these men, who, however, could build lucrative careers: take, for example, William Hunter (1718–1783), a skilled Scottish anatomist who became a successful man-midwife in London. He was much appreciated for his bedside manner, although in his *Anatomy of the Human Gravid Uterus* (1774) he published anatomical images of pregnancy and parturition, some of which are very explicit and can still appear shocking. Figure 22.8 gives you a sense of the quality of these images.

Historians have explained this remarkable change in different ways. Some have pointed to the introduction of a new instrument, the forceps, which became common in the early eighteenth century and provided men with the technology to deliver living (as well as dead) babies. However, the use of the forceps was contested and some men-midwives rather presented themselves as genteel, patient practitioners, keen to let nature run its course in a manner that contrasted with midwives’ allegedly intense manipulation of women’s bodies, or other practitioners’ use of instruments.



Figure 22.8 Jan van Rymsdyk, 'Gravid uterus, sixth month', engraving from William Hunter, *The Anatomy of the Human Gravid Uterus Exhibited in Figures*, 1774, London, S. Baker et al. Photo: Courtesy US National Library of Medicine. More graphic images of the pregnant body were included in this book.

The introduction of instruments or genteel manners cannot fully explain why women were persuaded to abandon centuries of modesty and decorum and let men handle their bodies. The argument has been made that in fact the main impetus for change came from women and their families. Both in England and France, men-midwives first became popular among the better-off and this has been read as evidence that the use of a supposedly more learned practitioner was becoming a sign of distinction. Keen to separate themselves from the habits they had traditionally shared with all pregnant women, educated wealthy women and their husbands now preferred the services of this new and socially distinguished kind of practitioner (Wilson, 1995). However, the historical debate continues as scholars have pointed out that the other place where men-midwives built successful careers was in lying-in hospitals; these were charitable institutions where unmarried or poor women delivered their babies. The recipients of charity, these women had no choice and provided men-midwives with the material for their training. In this case the initiative rested on male practitioners, although recent work has shown that midwives were not ousted from these hospitals and would still build strong bonds with the women (Cody, 2004). More broadly, some scholars have stressed the advantage that a new specialisation gave to physicians who, by the beginning of the eighteenth century, were working in a very competitive medical market (Evenden, 2000, p. 186).

This change inevitably altered the allocation of competence in the birthing room. Midwives still had a role but they were firmly placed under men's control.

Exercise 22.7

Turn to Reading 22.4, 'Different skills in the birthing room: William Smellie, *A Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Midwifery*' (1752), located at the end of the chapter. William Smellie (1697–1763) was a successful man-midwife and a teacher. Consider how he portrayed men-midwives and their female counterparts here.

Note that *accoucheur* was the French word for man-midwife and derived from *accoucher* (to give birth).

This should take around 10 minutes.

Discussion

What distinguished men from women was their broad anatomical and medical knowledge, encapsulated in the term ‘physic’ that Smellie associated with the male practitioners. He urged them to take any opportunity to practise, including with ‘real labours’, and this reveals that lack of direct experience may have been perceived as a potential weakness for men entering this area. You may have noticed Smellie’s emphasis on demureness and respectability, which shows persistent anxiety about this new practitioner’s status. The contrast with a midwife’s qualities is stark: she is not expected to possess theoretical knowledge, but rather proficiency in the practical aspects of childbirth; she has to be subservient and ready to admit the boundaries of her competence; these limits allegedly derive from women’s intrinsic intellectual weakness and this requires kindness (and we may say condescension) from the attending man-midwife.

As the word itself indicates, ‘man-midwifery’ blurred expected gender boundaries and generated uneasiness, as shown in the cartoon in Figure 22.9. As has been argued, men had to legitimise their new role:

It was perhaps for this reason that the two most distinguished men midwives of late 18th-century London, William Smellie and William Hunter, published illustrated atlases of the pregnant female body. By forging a link between midwifery and anatomical dissection and then publishing the results in expensive books with large, artistically sophisticated, copperplate engravings, Smellie and Hunter elevated a domestic practice to the status of medical science.

(Massey, 2005)



Figure 22.9 Folded colour frontispiece, 'A Man-Mid-Wife', and title page from S. W. Fores, *Man-Midwifery Dissected; Or, The Obstetric Family-Instructor ...* c.1795, London, S. W. Fores for the author. Wellcome Library, London. Copyrighted work available under Creative Commons Attribution only licence CC BY 4.0 <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>. Note that the name John Blunt which appears on the title page was a pseudonym.

The rise of men-midwives was most significant in England. Across Europe the situation varied. In France, male *accoucheurs* had started to be used earlier. In the 1650s surgeons were already attending normal (not difficult) deliveries and the employment of a male practitioner by Louis XIV (1638–1715, reigned 1643–1715) to deliver the baby borne by his mistress in 1663 boosted their status. At the Paris Hôtel-Dieu, the hospital where poor women had traditionally given birth under female supervision, from the 1630s birthing passed into men's control (Brockliss and Jones, 1997, p. 265). However, the process was patchy and *accoucheurs* remained rare in large parts of rural and southern France (McTavish, 2005, p. 11).

In the Netherlands, the services of town midwives were expanded from the late seventeenth century onwards. Men-midwives were to be

called in emergencies, but the new regulations did not favour them over midwives: '[the midwife's] position as attendant in normal cases of childbirth was guaranteed, something not assured in other European countries' (Marland, 1993, pp. 200, 206). Midwives remained confident members of their communities. In the Italian states, men-midwives had a limited presence in the birthing room until the nineteenth century, although men were increasingly in charge of teaching obstetrics. This remarkable variation in the practice of childbirth across Europe, however, coexisted with a much more shared impetus to educate midwives that gained strength in the eighteenth century.

Enlightened births: educating midwives and the politics of population

For centuries, midwives had been trained by senior colleagues or through practice. Starting in the seventeenth century, midwives themselves highlighted the need for better education. In the eighteenth century some midwives published manuals for their (literate) colleagues, for example Sarah Stone's *A Complete Practice of Midwifery* (1737). However, during this century states became increasingly interested in raising midwives' level of instruction and tended to place it in the hands of learned men.

Dutch midwives were increasingly required to attend anatomical lessons given by surgeons (Marland, 1993, p. 196). In England, Smellie and other teachers of midwifery imparted their knowledge to men and women, although the courses taught to men were longer and more detailed (King, 2007, p. 80). Schools for midwives were established in Venice and Milan in northern Italy. In 1714 Milan had become part of the Austrian kingdom, which under Maria Theresa (1717–1780, reigned 1740–80) and then Joseph II (1741–1790, reigned as emperor of the Holy Roman Empire 1765–90) was turned into a laboratory of political reform inspired by the Enlightenment. When a school for midwives attached to Milan's main hospital opened in the 1760s, administrators in nearby villages were invited to recommend suitable pupils (Pancino, 1984). In Bologna in the 1750s, Giovanni Antonio Galli (1708–1782) was appointed to teach obstetrics to surgeons and midwives, and among his teaching props was a glass womb that allowed him to assess the skills of a blindfolded midwife (Pancino, 2008, p. 722). In France, uniquely, an extremely entrepreneurial woman, Madame Angélique Marguerite Le Boursier du Coudray (c.1712–1794),

made educating midwives her mission. Between 1760 and 1783 she travelled all over the country to teach rural midwives, using the set of life-sized obstetrical models that she had made (Gelbart, 1998).

Overall, midwives' training became much more formal, with a greater emphasis on anatomical instruction. To view an obstetric model used by midwives, visit the 'Early modern world in objects' section of the module website.

One of the reasons why states as different as the Papal States (of which Bologna was part), the French monarchy and the Habsburg Empire invested in midwives' education rests in prevailing economic theories. An important tenet of the theory known as mercantilism was that the main indicator and source of a country's prosperity was a healthy, large and productive population. States broadened their intervention beyond the actions they had been taking to reduce the impact of epidemics that you have studied in Chapter 11. It was now the authorities' responsibility to ensure that populations grew and it quickly became clear that too many lives were lost through maternal and infant mortality. As one doctor claimed, this was hitting hard the 'class which is most useful to the state' (Filippini, 1993, p. 163): he meant the working class. It was in this context that midwives came to be seen as the main culprit and to be depicted as uniformly inept and superstitious.

The campaign for midwives' education shows an interesting combination between, on the one hand, the Enlightenment ideal of promoting scientific knowledge and ousting allegedly dangerous practices and, on the other, concerns for countries' economic affluence and political pre-eminence. Together these factors boosted medical men's authority.

Did the project succeed? Midwives' instruction certainly contributed to disseminating anatomical knowledge, but the fate of educated midwives was sometimes less favourable than they expected. On their return to their villages, for example, midwives who had trained in Milan faced competition from senior colleagues who had stayed at home. Unlike Englishwomen, in choosing their birth attendants women from the Lombard villages favoured familiarity and a solid reputation acquired on the ground to the theoretical knowledge gained in the big, far-away city. Like other Enlightenment projects imposed from above, this one seems to have failed to convince precisely those who were regarded as the primary target of action.

Midwives, however, could respond more actively to the new challenges. In England, Elizabeth Nihell (1723–1776) published in 1760 *A Treatise on the Art of Midwifery*, where she attacked the use of instruments and argued for the better service midwives could offer; she shrewdly commented that men-midwives prevented their female pupils from achieving ‘any eminence in the profession’ (quoted in King, 2007, p. 75).

Medical practitioners writing the history of obstetrics have often argued that university-educated men-midwives drove out ignorant midwives whose basic training had for centuries put women’s lives at risk. Partly prompted by recent discussions about who should be in charge of births, new historical research by social and medical historians has painted a more nuanced picture of the shift in childbirth from a domestic event to the subject of medical science. Depending on where they look and on their approach, some scholars present the phenomenon as ‘the appropriation of female experience’ by men (Evenden, 2000, p. 182). Others stress that the process was far from homogenous: in some countries the old arrangements continued into the nineteenth century. Others still underline the agency of women, both the midwives, whose degree of education and skills was much more varied than previously acknowledged, and the women in labour, whose decisions contributed to far-reaching change. Interestingly, some historians have argued that eighteenth-century lying-in hospitals may have added to, rather than mitigated, the high rate of mother and infant mortality because of the risk of cross infections (Loudon, 2000); recent research is drawing a less negative picture, claiming that on average giving birth was as safe there as at home (Cody, 2004, p. 342).

Online session 22.3

Now go to the module website and complete online session 22.3. This should take around an hour.

Conclusion

Astronomy and anatomy are two of the areas in which the empirical and mathematical approach promoted by the Scientific Revolution bore its most remarkable fruits. Accurate and repeated observations of the skies and the body led to fundamental changes in how nature was understood. New ideas stimulated the works of generations of natural philosophers, mathematicians and physicians, and by the end of the eighteenth century very few of the intellectual assumptions that had held sway for centuries remained intact. Aristotelian philosophy had lost its grip and society was about to be shaken by a revolution. While Stein's chapter in the set book (which you read in exercise 22.1) provides an overview of these broad intellectual changes, this chapter has taken a complementary approach, focusing on the complex process by which the new knowledge jostled with and then replaced the old. This is especially evident if we consider how ideas and beliefs moved across society, informing the life of learned and ordinary people alike.

In this chapter you have looked over the shoulders of astrologers as they met their clients' desire to know what their future held; of natural philosophers and physicians who continued to puzzle over the influence of the sky on the earth; of midwives proud of their expertise and ability to train junior colleagues; of successful physicians keen to embrace new knowledge but also still attracted by old ideas, and eager as much to educate midwives as to expand their clientele. You have also cast your gaze more broadly on those who in various ways used this diverse knowledge: sailors and farmers who read almanacs for information about the weather; politicians who used predictions to promote their cause; and women and their families, whose decision to trust an up-and-coming physician or an experienced midwife made or broke the careers of these practitioners.

As a result, rather than focusing on the account of how a string of brilliant scholars changed natural knowledge, you now have a picture of the subtler adjustments and the prolonged coexistence of the old and the new that characterised this period, and of the deep interactions between knowledge and society. This does not mean to deny the significance of Bacon, Descartes or Newton, or to belittle the effort of

those collecting medical observations or pursuing anatomical investigations. But you should have realised that knowledge that had guided people's learning and life for centuries did not disappear overnight and that even the most important innovators continued to share in the culture of their times.

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Readings

Reading 22.1 Predicting the future in the Renaissance: Girolamo Cardano

Source: Grafton, A. (1999) *Cardano's Cosmos: The Worlds and Works of a Renaissance Astrologer*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, pp. 40–2.

The perfect original correlation of the two spheres, Cardano argued, 'was a sign of a great equality, which in truth produced our faith.' At present, however, the first degree of the Zodiacal sign of Aries was almost 50 degrees away from its original place, at 20 degrees of Taurus. The loss of equality in heaven produced a loss of faith on earth. ... Even the slight improvement that the influence of Jupiter would cause could not reverse the general downward course of religion. ...

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Cardano flanked this long-term prediction ... with others that rested on more immediate celestial portents .. [A] whole series of omens had recently appeared in the sky and the atmosphere, all of which made the short-term future look very dark. ...

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Cardano foresaw problems ahead for Charles V, the Holy Roman Emperor who had defeated the French in Italy in 1525 and seemed to control the political and religious fate of Europe ... Less sweepingly still, Cardano gave his readers very precise weather predictions, warning them in advance of a drought between 6 July and 9 August 1536, and foggy and tempestuous weather on the twenty-fifth of August 1537 ...

The *Pronostico* ... combined gloomy prophecies of the transformation of the church with expressions of partial optimism. It provided both practical advice for farmers, doctors, and others concerned with short-term futures and theoretical advice for the rulers of church and state.

Reading 22.2 Francis Bacon and the reformation of astrology

Source: Rutkin, H. D. (2006) 'Astrology', in Park, K. and Daston, L. (eds) *The Cambridge History of Science*, vol 3: *Early Modern Science*, New York, Cambridge University Press, pp. 550–1.

Francis Bacon proposed a serious reform of astrology ... [and] began by identifying the many superstitions and lies that needed to be removed from its domain, including the individual planetary rule of each hour of the day and the astrological figure constructed for precise points of time. Reviewing the four principal divisions of astrological practice – revolutions, nativities, elections, and interrogations – he argued that the last three had little if any foundation, whereas he described revolutions as much more sound, though nonetheless in need of attention.³⁸

To make the doctrine of revolutions optimal in practice, Bacon prescribed five general rules: most notably, that the operation of the heavens is not strong on all kinds of bodies but only on finer ones, such as humors, air, and *spiritus*; and that every operation of the heavens extends more to the mass of things than to individuals, and only to larger spaces of time, not points of time or precise minutes. Retaining the traditional doctrines of planetary natures and aspects (the astrologically significant angular relationships between planets) – and affirming the principle that the heavenly bodies have in themselves other influences beyond heat and light³⁹ – Bacon turned to predictions. His considered views, after a lifetime as courtier and politician, are striking: Astrological predictions can profitably be applied to both natural and political domains, including weather, epidemics, and war, but only within a prescribed degree of specificity. Bacon made two important points in this regard, noting that the domain in which astrological predictions may be applied is virtually infinite, but that knowledge of the celestial configuration ... does not suffice.⁴⁰ One must also have a deep knowledge of the subjects at issue, the recipients of the active planetary influences. This knowledge seems to be

[p. 551]

³⁸ Francis Bacon, *De augmentis scientiarum*, in *The Works of Francis Bacon*, ed. J. Spedding et al., 14 vols. (London: Longmans, 1857–74; repr. Stuttgart: Frommann, 1963), I: 554–60.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, I: 556: "...quod nobis pro certo constet, Coelestia in se habere alios quosdam influxus praeter Calorem et lumen. ..."

⁴⁰ In this he followed Ptolemy in *hi Tetrabiblos*, I.2–3.

precisely what Bacon's broader natural-historical research program was intended to provide.

... Rejecting the collection of future experiences as futile, he suggested historical research. ... In particular, astrologers should comb the best histories to locate important events, which should then be compared with the heavenly situations at those times in accordance with his reforming precepts. Where there is a clear correlation, a rule of prediction may be inferred, he concluded, thus applying his inductive procedure to astrological reform.

Reading 22.3 Ordinance regulating midwives, Germany, 1522

Source: quoted in Chojnacka, M. and Wiesner-Hanks, M. (eds) (2002) *Ages of Woman, Ages of Man: Sources in European Social History, 1400–1750*, Abingdon and New York, Routledge, pp. 8–10.

Every midwife should give her oath and swear she will conscientiously care for and stand by every expectant mother in her time of need to whom she is called, whether she is rich or poor, to the best of her abilities and understanding. She should proceed to whomever she is called first, immediately and without opposition, and make absolutely no excuses or delays, as has often been the case, but faithfully stand by her. ...

If the thing [the delivery] looks like it will be dangerous, she should call one or two of the women who oversee midwifery and proceed with the emergency according to their advice. In no case is she to wait or delay ... or she will warrant serious punishment.

If any midwives show themselves to be disobedient or disagreeable, the city council will not only remove them from office, but will also punish them severely, so that all will know to shape up and watch their behavior.

...

From now on ... every apprentice shall stay with the woman with whom she started. Justifiable and legitimate cause for leaving may be proven to the council In such cases, ... the woman that caused the apprentice to leave through her unfairness and unreasonableness

[p. 9]

will not be allowed to take on another apprentice until the end of the training years of the first.

They should ... take on apprentices well advanced in years and preferably living alone, from whom one expects more diligence than from younger ones.

...

The honorable council has discovered that the midwives often send their maids (who have not completed their instruction or who have just completed it and have no experience yet) alone to women who are giving birth for the first time, through which these women are often neglected and deplorably injured. Therefore the honorable council orders that from now on no maid, whether she has half-completed her training or not, is to attend alone any woman bearing her first or second child. [p. 10]

Reading 22.4 Different skills in the birthing room: William Smellie, *A Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Midwifery*

Source: Smellie, W. (1752) *A Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Midwifery*, London, pp. 446–9.

Of the Accoucheur.

THOSE who intend to practice midwifery, ought first of all to make themselves masters of anatomy, and acquire a competent knowledge in surgery and physic; because of their connection with the obstetric art, if not always, at least in many cases ... he should also embrace every occasion of being present at real labours, and indeed of acquiring every qualification that may be necessary or convenient for him in the future exercise of his profession; but, over and above the advantages of education, he ought to be endued with a natural sagacity, resolution, and prudence; together with that humanity which adorns the owner, and never fails of being agreeable to the distressed patient ... He ought to act and speak with the utmost delicacy of decorum, and never violate the trust reposed in him, so as to harbour the least immoral or indecent design ... [p. 447]

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Of the midwife.

A midwife, though she can hardly be supposed mistress of all these qualifications, ought to be a decent, sensible woman, of a middle age, able to bear fatigue; she ought to be perfectly well instructed with regard to the bones of the *Pelvis* ... she ought to be well skilled in the method of touching pregnant women, and know in what manner the womb stretches ... be ... mistress of the art of examination in time of labour ... she ought to avoid all reflections upon men-practitioners; and when she finds herself difficulted, candidly have recourse to their assistance: on the other hand, this confidence ought to be encouraged by the man, who, when called, instead of openly condemning her method of practice (even though it should be erroneous) ought to make allowance for the weakness of the sex.

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Chapter 23 Ideas and the Enlightenment

Anna Plassart

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Learning outcomes

By the end of this chapter you should be able to:

- understand the notion of 'Enlightenment' and the ideals it promoted
- demonstrate knowledge of the Enlightenment movement in the context of the social, economic and political contexts of its time
- appreciate the role of ideas in the development of modern Europe.

Introduction

Throughout the module you have been studying how ideas and perceptions shaped the early modern world. The chapter ‘Old and new knowledge’ (Chapter 22) showed you how new scientific ideas and other knowledge influenced everyday practices in the seventeenth century, and in this chapter you will examine how these new ideas also paved the way for an intellectual movement that transformed eighteenth-century Europe: the Enlightenment.

The Enlightenment transformed Europe because it challenged many of the traditional authorities you have learned about in the previous chapters. One of the key themes running throughout the module has been the idea of authority, and you have studied the many forms this could take in the lives of early modern men and women. But in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries some of these traditional structures and norms began to be increasingly questioned.

The authority of the church was particularly challenged as Enlightenment writers rejected its teachings, instead relying on the reasoning powers of the human mind in their discussions of nature, morality and society. Consequently, the Enlightenment became associated with many of the social, cultural and political changes that characterised the end of the early modern period – including the rise of literacy, the technical advances of the Industrial Revolution, the political revolutions of America (1775–83) and France (1789–99), and, maybe most importantly, new ideals of progress, equality and liberty that still shape the modern developed world today. Therefore, the aims of this chapter are both to explain how the Enlightenment emerged from the early modern world you have studied so far, and to ask how this relatively elite intellectual phenomenon could have had such an impact on European history as a whole.

I have suggested that the core principle of the Enlightenment was its challenge of traditional moral and intellectual authorities, and that this challenge could take many different forms. You will begin this chapter by examining why such a varied set of activities is considered as belonging to one single ‘movement’, and how this movement was both steeped in and reacting against the early modern world you have studied so far. This will provide you with a more specific definition of the notion of ‘Enlightenment’.

You will proceed to examine how the basic principle of Enlightenment thought (faith in human reason) was applied to several areas of knowledge, including religion, education and politics. Then you will explore how all these different areas of enquiry related to the Enlightenment's optimistic belief in the possibility of progress, and its larger ambition to improve society. Finally, you will be introduced to alternative ways of thinking about the Enlightenment, and will learn why some historians are now highlighting a darker, more controversial side to the Enlightenment and its heritage.

Exercise 23.1

To give you a broad overview of the various ways in which traditional ideas, social structures and cultural norms were challenged by the Enlightenment, turn to Colin Jones, 'Enlightenment' in the set book and read pages 236–47. You will see that Jones focuses on the intellectual achievements of the movement, which are many and varied. This can be a little overwhelming at first: do not focus too much on all the names and titles he mentions, and instead try to follow the flow of his argument. Summarise the main point of each section for yourself, in no more than two sentences for each one.

This should take around an hour.

There is no discussion for this exercise.

23.1 What was the Enlightenment?

Definition

A very general way to define the term Enlightenment is to say that it refers to a period of particularly intense intellectual activity in Europe in the eighteenth century that can be understood as a reaction against many of the beliefs, cultural practices and social structures that you have studied in the previous chapters. As its name indicates (to enlighten is to throw light on previous darkness), it aimed to stand against obscurantism, against the unquestioning acceptance of supposed religious and political truths. Instead, it promoted reason, freedom of thought and science. Therefore, in many ways, the Enlightenment marks the transition between an early modern world that can often appear to us strange and alien, and a modern world we can recognise today. It is not uncommon to still hear twenty-first-century journalists or politicians defending the ‘values’ of the Enlightenment.

This is one way of helping us relate to the Enlightenment, but you should be careful not to give it too much weight. The Enlightenment remained a product of the early modern society you have been studying. Even when writers and thinkers were criticising elements of this society, their work was still steeped in world views, cultural norms and social structures that we are not familiar with. It also had a darker side, which would not be seen as ‘modern’ today: in spite of its lofty ideals, it continued to marginalise female voices and popular culture, and sometimes promoted ideas of imperialism and racial inequality.

With this in mind, here is a more specific definition for the intellectual identity of the Enlightenment. Enlightenment thinkers often trusted human reason rather than the teachings of the church; they often favoured principles of social and political reform as well as religious toleration; they often discussed their ideas in urban settings such as salons and coffee houses as well as through international networks of correspondence. Most importantly perhaps, Enlightenment thinkers tended to believe that as human knowledge expanded, society could and would improve. The idea that social and historical progress is

possible for humanity was established by the Enlightenment, and epitomises the general optimism of the movement and its faith in the powers of reason and science.

As you may notice, some of the principles I just mentioned can seem somewhat commonplace to a modern European reader: this is because they were inherited from the Enlightenment (Gay, 1966). You will notice, too, that the characteristics I listed are not hard-and-fast rules. There is also no consensus about the chronological boundaries of the movement: some historians argue that it started in the mid- to late seventeenth century; for others it began with the eighteenth century. There is less disagreement about its end point, which is often taken to be the start of the French Revolution in 1789. One major reason why it is difficult to agree on precise chronological boundaries is that the Enlightenment happened in different ways in different countries. Because it is so difficult to find a single definition that covers all aspects and all writers of the Enlightenment, some historians even argue that we shouldn't talk about one Enlightenment, but rather about many different 'Enlightenments' (Israel, 2012; Robertson, 2007; Hunter, 2001). In this chapter I will mention several such national and regional Enlightenments, but I consider that the Enlightenment remained a broader European movement with a relatively cohesive intellectual identity.

You will be learning more about the ideas of the Enlightenment in online session 23.1, which includes important exercises that will help you understand Enlightenment ideas.

Why did the Enlightenment happen?

One important feature of Enlightenment thought was the emphasis on using human reason (as opposed to relying on 'truths' given by tradition, authority figures, or religion). This may seem like a straightforward principle, but it was in fact daring and innovative in the eighteenth century. In the context of an overwhelmingly Christian society, it would have been seen as arrogant to 'worship reason' instead of worshipping God; that is to say, to trust the powers of the human mind more than the teachings of the Bible. The abilities of human reason, however, were becoming ever more widely recognised and admired since the Scientific Revolution of the seventeenth century,

which you have encountered in Chapter 22. Scientists such as Francis Bacon (1561–1626) developed an **empiricist** methodology that based scientific knowledge on observation and experiments; Isaac Newton (1643–1727) relied on a similar methodology to discover the laws of motion that explained the movements of planets and brought immense prestige to the ‘scientific method’. These new discoveries were publicised by scientific societies and academies, whose select members conducted experiments, published their findings in scientific journals, exchanged ideas and sponsored new research. Many such societies and academies were founded in the late seventeenth century, most famously England’s Royal Society (founded in 1660) and France’s Académie des Sciences (founded in 1666).

In addition to the Scientific Revolution, other early modern developments favoured the type of challenge to traditional authorities that characterised the Enlightenment. Between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries, the Renaissance saw the rediscovery of classical Greek philosophy, which provided a new impetus to European art and literature. The Reformation that swept over Europe in the sixteenth century encouraged ordinary people to read the Bible for themselves instead of relying on the inherited beliefs and traditions of the Catholic Church, and the religious conflicts it triggered in places such as Britain, Germany and France led many prominent writers such as the Dutch humanist Desiderius Erasmus (1466–1536), the French essayist Michel de Montaigne (1533–1592) and the English writer and politician Thomas More (1478–1535) to advocate religious tolerance. In the chapter ‘Religious conflict, emigration and coexistence’ (Chapter 19), you studied the new policies of toleration that also arose from these conflicts.

These intellectual and political developments all favoured, in different ways, a new thirst for free enquiry and free discussion. The latter were also encouraged by a number of long-term social, cultural and economic transformations in early modern Europe. In previous chapters you have already looked at the development of urban life, commerce and industry, and the chapter ‘Literacy, learning and the printed word’ (Chapter 12) in Book 2 has explored the ‘print revolution’ as well as the reasons behind increasing literacy rates, especially in populated urban areas and among the new commercial

classes. While the Reformation played a large part in this increase, Enlightenment reading practices became less focused on religion. In Paris the proportion of religious books published dropped from around 50 per cent in the late seventeenth century to only 10 per cent in 1790 (Chartier, 1991, pp. 70–1). Conversely, the number of literary publications written in French (and not in Latin) increased sharply. Such books remained very expensive, but new systems of free public libraries and cheaper editions produced by a rapidly evolving publishing industry helped popularise works beyond the wealthiest classes (as you learned in Chapter 12 and also in the chapter ‘Broader horizons’: Chapter 17).

Indeed, this booming publishing industry was fuelled by the growth of the middling sort, or ‘bourgeoisie’. The middling sort included merchants, lawyers, doctors, government officials and financiers, and grew out of the gradual urbanisation and industrialisation of Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Contemporary estimates suggested it made up about a third of all families in Britain in the eighteenth century (Maza, 2012, p. 137), although the proportion was likely lower in France, which remained much less urbanised than Britain. These new, relatively wealthy classes could afford to buy books, and aspired to an aristocratic model of education for their children, including their daughters. They also enjoyed discussing their reading in a number of newly developed settings: the first coffee houses appeared in Italy, Britain and France in the middle of the seventeenth century and quickly became popular as places to conduct business meetings, discuss current events and read papers. Women were not always welcome in coffee houses, but salons (philosophical and literary gatherings hosted by women in their homes) became increasingly popular in France from the seventeenth century onwards.

The Renaissance had seen the rise of a new community of scholars, who communicated across borders through books, travel and letters. This was known as the ‘Republic of Letters’ and it continued to thrive in the Enlightenment. Some scholars see this as a precursor of the so-called public sphere, which they believe emerged in the Enlightenment (Habermas, 1989 [1962]).

The notion of ‘public sphere’ was first proposed by the German philosopher Jürgen Habermas in his 1962 book *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. According to Habermas, it is characterised by the existence of public opinion, and by the free participation of citizens in public debates about the rules of society and politics.

In the past decades, historians have criticised many elements of the public sphere theory: in particular, they argue that the supposedly ‘public’ sphere still often excluded many groups, especially women. Nevertheless, it remains true that intellectual exchanges and discussions increasingly happened, in the newly developed coffee houses and in literary salons, academies and clubs, as well as via letters, books and all artistic media (including paintings, novels and plays). These played a large role in challenging the authority of religious and political powers, by creating a space to criticise and often mock the behaviour of a country’s leaders. Indeed, it was not only philosophers and scientists who participated in these public discussions, but also a large number of novelists and pamphleteers with no particular literary ambitions, whose satirical and often vulgar publications also played a part in damaging the prestige of monarchical and ecclesiastical institutions, especially in France.

For example, the cartoon in Figure 23.1 pokes fun at the outlandish hairstyles favoured by the French queen, Marie-Antoinette (1755–1793), and imitated by other members of the aristocracy. But it also has a more serious undertone: Marie-Antoinette was resented by the French population for her love of costly clothes and jewellery, at a time when the French state was in serious financial trouble. Anonymous cartoonists and pamphleteers criticised her spending habits, her supposedly loose morals and the fact that she was a foreigner (from Austria). Images like this one did not directly call for the later drastic political upheaval of the French Revolution (which saw Marie-Antoinette beheaded), but they still undermined respect for the monarchy.



Figure 23.1 'Coiffure à l'échelle', from *Costumes de Paris à travers les siècles*, c.1774. Photo: © Mary Evans Picture Library.

The *philosophes*

The *philosophes* (the word literally means 'philosophers', but is used to describe a wider group of writers and thinkers in many fields) were the figureheads of the Enlightenment. They were writers whose novels, essays, pamphlets and philosophical treatises were widely read, and

even often bestsellers – some of these writers, such as Voltaire (the pen name of François-Marie Arouet, 1694–1778) and Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778), who will be discussed later in the chapter, were genuine celebrities who attracted mobs of admirers in the street and received fan mail.

In their writings the *philosophes* tackled deep philosophical and political questions such as the origin of morality and the legitimacy of government, but they also often criticised or mocked established institutions such as monarchy and religion. I explained in the previous section that the Enlightenment is often associated with ideas of disrespect for traditional authorities, and the *philosophes* played an important part in this. For instance the French political writer Charles de Montesquieu (1689–1755) mocked the court of the French king, Louis XIV (1638–1715, reigned 1643–1715), in the epistolary novel *Persian Letters* (1721); the Genevan philosopher Rousseau criticised religious education in his educational treatise *Emile* (1762); and the Scottish historian and philosopher David Hume (1711–1776) argued in several works against the philosophical foundations of all religions. It was common for Enlightenment works to be published anonymously to protect their authors, but nevertheless many enlightened philosophers were censored or forced to live in exile at some point in their writing careers.

You have already encountered the notion of censorship in Chapter 12. Censorship was particularly active in eighteenth-century France, where all publications had to be officially approved by the king, and all works challenging religious or royal authority were forbidden. Consequently many authors published abroad or anonymously.

However, the *philosophes*' relationship with official authorities was more ambiguous than it might first appear from my summary so far. They also often benefited from aristocratic and even royal support. For instance, between 1750 and 1752 Voltaire was employed at the court of the emperor of Prussia, Frederick II (1712–1786, reigned 1740–86). In addition, many *philosophes* supported the idea of 'enlightened absolutism'. This referred to absolute monarchs who ruled according to the principles of the Enlightenment, such as Frederick II of Prussia

or Catherine II of Russia (1729–1796, reigned 1762–96) – both known as ‘the Great’.

So far you have seen that Enlightenment writers favoured ideas of liberty and criticised the excesses of monarchy. Therefore, you may find it strange that they would also support absolute rulers. But for an eighteenth-century writer, this was not a contradiction. The Enlightenment did encourage ways of thinking that eventually opened the way for the democratic revolutions of the late eighteenth century, but this was never their intention. In fact, none of the *philosophes* advocated the democratic political systems that exist today. For them ‘liberty’ meant the right to exchange ideas freely, not the right to vote. In their view (which was also the perspective of most people in early modern Europe), democratic governments did not imply liberty or freedom, but rather disorder, violence and the rule of the mob. A much better way to govern, they thought, was the rule of a wise and beneficent monarch.

A wide range of intellectual activities

As you have learned, eighteenth-century philosophers were the figureheads of the Enlightenment. But the Enlightenment was also a much wider phenomenon, both in terms of the range of interests displayed by enlightened thinkers, and in terms of its social and geographical spread. The scientific method was applied to industry, art, medicine and a wide array of philosophical and educational pursuits. Enlightenment painters emphasised the need to observe their subjects directly and reproduce their observations precisely, and realistic paintings of landscapes became fashionable. Architects used geometric forms and ‘ideal proportions’ inspired by classical antiquity (this style is known as **classicism**). Physicians increasingly relied on the study of anatomy to understand the functioning of the human body; botanists set out to observe and describe all known species of plants; economists based their theories on the analysis of production figures available. Historians such as Montesquieu and the Scots Adam Ferguson (1723–1816) and William Robertson (1721–1793) examined human history to try to identify the universal rules of the progress of societies. Even philosophers attempted to adopt Newton’s method, and used empirical reasoning to argue for and against the existence of God (see my discussion of Locke later in the chapter). Enlightened writers also often had varied interests, like Joseph Priestley (1733–1804), whose

many published works focused on topics as diverse as theology, chemistry, education and political theory.

The painting reproduced in Figure 23.2 illustrates the new place of science in society. It is innovative in its choice of subject: it is not a formal portrait, nor a traditional historical or religious scene. Rather, it depicts a modern scientific experiment. Here a scientist is demonstrating to his audience the effects of the air pump developed by Robert Boyle (1627–1691), by depriving a cockatoo of air. Boyle was one of the first scientists to rely on experiments (rather than logical discussion) to understand the physical world, and he used the air pump to make several important discoveries about the properties of air.



Figure 23.2 Joseph Wright of Derby, *An Experiment on a Bird in the Air Pump*, 1768, oil on canvas, 183 x 244 cm. National Gallery, London, UK. Photo: © National Gallery / Bridgeman Images.

The scene illustrates a new reverence for the powers of science: symbolically, the experiment is the main source of light in the room, thus ‘enlightening’ the darkness around. The audience depicted is varied (it includes children, women and men), which is meant to show how scientific research could reach and improve the whole of society.

Online session 23.1

Now go to the module website and complete online session 23.1. This should take around an hour and a half.

23.2 The powers of human reason

In the previous section you have been provided with an overview of the wide range of intellectual activities that formed the Enlightenment. I will now focus more closely on a few key themes that particularly preoccupied Enlightenment writers. In this section you will see how Enlightenment writers grappled with a seemingly basic question: where does human knowledge come from? Their answer, by and large, was that our knowledge of the world does not come directly from the Bible, but rather from our minds – from the use of our God-given reason. This may seem a very abstract discussion, but, as you will see, it had practical consequences in a number of areas, notably education and politics.

As I have briefly mentioned before, empiricism was a scientific theory that stated knowledge could be derived only from experience. In order to show that the influence of empiricism went beyond purely scientific knowledge, I will use the example of John Locke (1632–1704), who is considered one of the fathers of the Enlightenment. Locke became very famous in his lifetime for his writings on political liberty, empiricism, religious toleration and education. He was seen as the philosophical counterpart to Newton.

Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689) was an immense public success. The book asserted that the human mind is a *tabula rasa* (a blank slate), which acquires knowledge through experience. This 'blank slate' theory had important consequences for the value of education: since the mind is shaped by experience, Locke argued in *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693) that people are defined by their education. His position was opposed to the more traditional view of Christianity, which held that human nature is defined by original sin. Conversely, Locke wrote at the beginning of his educational treatise: 'I think I may say that of all the men we meet with, nine parts of ten are what they are, good or evil, useful or not, by their education' (Locke, 1824 [1693], p. 6). Therefore the object of education was to fill this empty mind with appropriate experiences that would shape the child's entire mind. The book was a bestseller in eighteenth-century Britain and France, going through dozens of editions. Along with Rousseau's educational treatise *Emile* (1762) – which took a very different approach to education, emphasising the need to protect children against the corrupting influences of society – it deeply influenced the

practice of home education in eighteenth-century Europe, which you looked at in Chapter 12.

Religious scepticism and toleration

Locke's theory of mind also had important consequences in another field: it provided a philosophical basis for both religious toleration and scepticism. Scepticism can be explained as follows. Since the human mind can derive knowledge only from experience, the existence of a divine power cannot be proven. From this sceptical argument, it follows that humans cannot determine with certainty the truth of questions surrounding religion, and that individuals should therefore be left free to pursue religious enquiries and hold different beliefs. It is important to note that while Locke advocated toleration, he was himself reluctant to accept the sceptical implications of his writings. Most Locke scholars believe he was close to the religious position called deism, which holds that the world and its rules were created by a God, but that this God does not intervene in his creation through supernatural events or miracles. This was a relatively common position held by many philosophers in the seventeenth century. Locke's philosophy was pushed in a sceptical direction by other empiricist writers such as Hume, but atheism (the lack of belief in God) remained extremely rare even among enlightened philosophers.

Religious scepticism, however, is most associated with the French Enlightenment. Voltaire was particularly famous for his satirical attacks on religious intolerance and his defence of freedom of thought: a series of successful books (notably the *Lettres Philosophiques* in 1734, *Zadig* in 1748, *Candide* in 1759) displaying his witty and humorous style made him a celebrity in France and beyond. Voltaire was an anti-clerical, rather than anti-religious writer: he attacked the French Catholic Church, but considered himself a religious man.

The *Encyclopédie* was an eighteenth-century encyclopaedia written by a group of enlightened men led by Denis Diderot (1713–1784) and Jean d'Alembert (1717–1783). (I discuss the *Encyclopédie* in more detail later in the chapter.) It was accused of religious subversion, and the accusation was at least partly accurate: like Voltaire, many *encyclopédistes* saw their project as a fight against the obscurantist and fanatical tendencies of the church, but not necessarily against religious belief. In the caricature reproduced in Figure 23.3 you can see the *encyclopédie*



Figure 23.3 ‘Caricature of Diderot’, engraving, cropped from a page in Le Père Fruchet, *Reflexions d’un franciscain, avec une lettre préliminaire, adressées a monsieur *** auteur en partie du Dictionnaire encyclopédique*, 1752, Paris, Marc Bordelet. Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris. Photo: BnF.

article for the word ‘capuchon’ (a Franciscan monk’s hood), in which Diderot mocked religious orders and praised ‘healthy philosophy’ instead. The text above the image reads ‘you too will have to fear Francis’s whip’, (referring to St Francis, a major saint for monastic orders and known for the practice of self-flagellation); the illustration is a drawing of Diderot being chased by the whip of St Francis.

Online session 23.2

Now go to the module website and complete online session 23.2. This should take around an hour.

23.3 Progress and universal knowledge

In the previous section you saw how enlightened writers relied on the powers of human reason to not only understand the world around them, but also find ways to improve their society through education and political reform. This leads me to one of the major themes of the Enlightenment: the idea that humankind could, and would, improve.

The idea of progress

To people who live in modern democracies, it seems normal to think of history in terms of progress: there is an instinctive belief that it is better to live in the twenty-first century than during the Middle Ages and it seems obvious that technology and science will continue to move forward. As you have learned in the module, however, history reflects much continuity as well as change and not all change can be identified as progress. Moreover, early modern Europeans did not generally think about the world in terms of progress. From a Christian perspective, it was not obvious at all that history was steadily moving forward or that society would or should improve; the usual view was that humanity should remain focused on preparing for the Last Judgement and the prospect of heaven or ‘the end of the earthly world’.

It is the Enlightenment that ‘invented’ the idea of progress. This idea was heavily influenced by the discoveries of the Scientific Revolution: the advances of science showed that humans were capable of understanding and changing the world around them, that they could build on their predecessors’ discoveries to increase their knowledge. It encouraged an optimistic view of the future: as scientific knowledge accumulated, it was thought that humans would become wiser and happier.

Online session 23.3

Now go to the module website and complete online session 23.3. This should take around an hour.

The search for universal knowledge: Diderot and d'Alembert's *Encyclopédie* project

L'Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers (*The Encyclopaedia, or A Systematic Dictionary of the Sciences, Arts and Crafts*) was the first French encyclopaedia. The project was characteristic of the Enlightenment faith in progress that I have just described, and it is one of the most famous symbols of the Enlightenment movement. The *Encyclopédie* aimed to present the sum of human knowledge in all fields (philosophy, science, geography and so on) and to make it available to as wide a number of people as possible, in order to facilitate further progress. It was published in 17 volumes of text and 11 volumes of illustrations (such as the drawing in Figure 23.4) between 1751 and 1772. The *Encyclopédie* is often referred to as 'Diderot and d'Alembert's encyclopaedia', after its two editors. But because it was such a huge project, it required the collaboration of many writers and scientists from France and Europe's Republic of Letters. Historians have identified 158 distinct encyclopaedists, including writers from Poland, Lithuania and Switzerland (Proust, 1995, pp. 514–15). Together they wrote 75,000 entries and over 20 million words.

The *Encyclopédie* was intended for a European readership, since many of the upper classes read and spoke French. While many of the encyclopaedists were scientists with no radical political agendas, the *Encyclopédie* as a project challenged traditional authorities by basing knowledge (especially political and religious knowledge) on reason and science rather than the authority of church and government.

The *Encyclopédie* sold very well: publishers would normally print at most 1,500 copies for popular works, but 4,255 copies of the *Encyclopédie* were printed. This is all the more remarkable given the very high cost of the books. An entire set of the first edition came to 980 livres, at a time when a skilled tradesman earned only around 750 livres a year. Only the upper echelons of society could afford even the later, relatively cheaper editions (although you should keep in mind that a single copy could be read by many people).

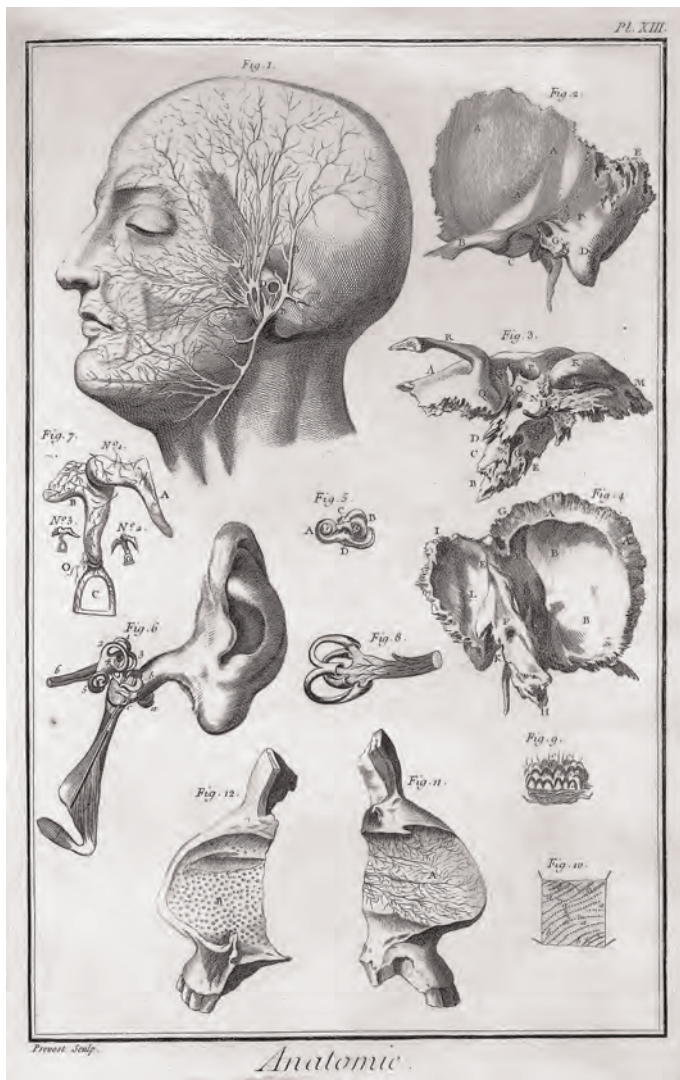


Figure 23.4 Unknown artist, 'Illustrations of the anatomy of the ear', engraving, from Denis Diderot and Jean-Baptiste le Rond d'Alembert, *L'Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers, par une société de gens de lettres. Recueil de planches sur les sciences, les arts libéraux et les arts mécaniques, avec leur explication*, 1762, Paris, Briasson. Wellcome Library, London. Copyrighted work available under Creative Commons Attribution only licence CC BY 4.0 <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>. This image is taken from the entry 'Anatomy'. The *Encyclopédie*'s illustrations (or 'plates') show how important scientific observation was to the *encyclopédistes*. This is in sharp contrast to medieval and early modern texts, which focused on theological, moral and philosophical knowledge rather than on technical knowledge and skills.

Exercise 23.2

Examine Figures 23.5 and 23.6. Figure 23.5 tracks the geographical distribution of the sales of a later edition (published in 1776), by looking at the records of the booksellers who ordered it. Figure 23.6 focuses on a single medium-sized city to establish the profession of the buyers. (Note that the 'First Estate' is the clergy, the 'Second Estate' is the aristocracy, and the 'Third Estate' is the rest of the population – about 97 per cent of people!)

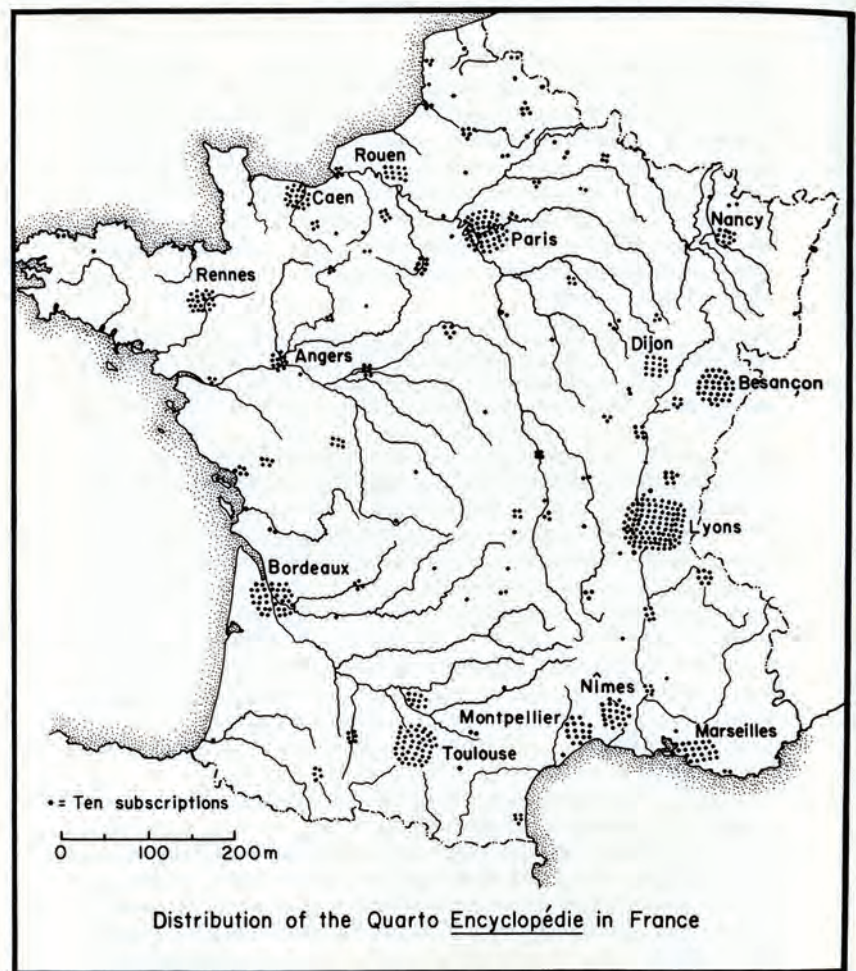


Figure 23.5 Map showing the distribution of *Encyclopédie* sales in France for the 1776 edition. Robert Darnton (1973) 'The *Encyclopédie* wars of prerevolutionary France', *American Historical Review*, volume 78, number 5, 1 December, p. 1348. By permission of Oxford University Press.

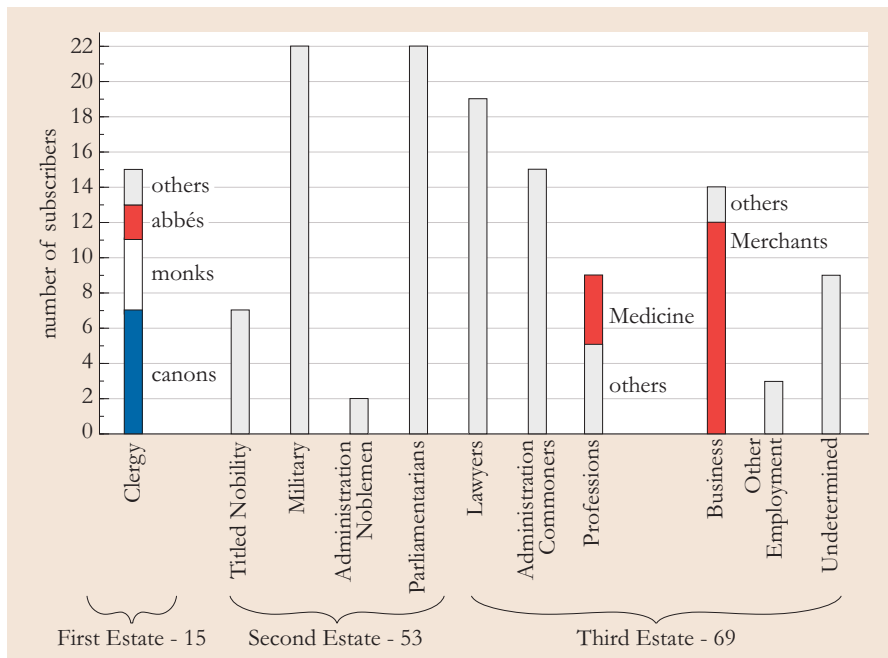


Figure 23.6 Graph showing subscribers to the 1776 edition of the *Encyclopédie* in a medium-sized French city. Robert Darnton (1973) 'The *Encyclopédie* wars of prerevolutionary France', *American Historical Review*, volume 78, number 5, 1 December, p. 1350. By permission of Oxford University Press.

- What do these two documents tell us about who read the *Encyclopédie*?

This should take around 20 minutes.

Discussion

Figure 23.5 shows that the readership of the *Encyclopédie* was widely distributed throughout France, especially in larger cities which formed intellectual and economic centres. The map suggests that Paris did not dominate the readership, but keep in mind that we are talking about a later edition of the *Encyclopédie*: the Parisian market was likely already saturated.

Figure 23.6 shows that the aristocracy and clergy were disproportionately represented among the buyers of the *Encyclopédie* (the First and Second Estates accounted for around half the subscribers, but represented only 3 per cent of the population!). This goes against the idea that the Enlightenment worked against the establishment: instead,

Enlightenment writers and ideas were very much supported by the aristocracy (who also filled the ranks of the higher clergy and the military).

However, not all enlightened writers were as wholeheartedly optimistic as the *encyclopédistes* about the possibility and benefits of progress. Edmund Burke (1729–1797), for instance, was in many ways a typical enlightened man: he was a historian, a philosopher and a politician, and he defended political and religious liberties throughout his life, writing in favour of the American colonists during the American War of Independence (1775–83) as well as in favour of Catholic emancipation (the equality of rights for Roman Catholics in Britain). There were, however, aspects of Enlightenment thought that he deeply distrusted. He argued that it was unwise to rely on human reason too much, especially in the field of politics, because ideas could appear sound in theory but have catastrophic results in practice. Societies therefore needed the support of tradition and religion to remain stable. This is why Burke eventually became one of the most forceful critics of the French Revolution after 1789, which his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790) denounced as a dangerous social and political experiment.

23.4 The limits of Enlightenment

So far I have presented the Enlightenment as a movement characterised by its modernity. In this section you will explore more problematic aspects of Enlightenment thought, especially concerning its discussions of race and gender.

Understanding human nature: civilisation, ‘savages’ and race

The **Age of Discovery** in early modern Europe resulted in a new thirst for knowledge about the wider world and in an explosion of travel literature, as you learned in Chapter 17. Travel literature had existed since ancient times (a well-known example would be Homer’s *Odyssey*), but the development of the print industry in the eighteenth century turned accounts of far-away journeys into bestselling books. Travel literature helped spread a greater awareness of different cultures, habits and modes of government during the period. As you learned in Chapter 17, people from other countries or regions were often viewed as ‘different’ or ‘other’ in the later early modern period. But such travel literature also fostered the development of a sentimental way of looking at far-away cultures, which idealised them as illustrating the lost innocence of Europeans. This goes back to the idea of the state of nature I discussed in online session 23.2. For instance, Rousseau developed the idealised image of the ‘noble savage’: that is to say, humans who were still naturally good, not yet corrupted by civilisation.

Others took different lessons from this expansion of the European mental world. Many writers started wondering *why* these newly discovered societies were so different from European societies, *why* they had developed different structures, traditions and government. One answer to these questions was Montesquieu’s influential theory of climates: in the *Spirit of the Laws* (1748), Montesquieu suggested that the geography and climate in which humans live influence their behaviour, for instance positing that cold climates make humans more vigorous and bold, while warm climates make them more fearful and indolent. While these theories may seem strange to a twenty-first-century reader, they were an inventive attempt to solve the question of differences between societies: if the human mind was the same everywhere (as Enlightenment thought held), then why were customs so different around the globe? The answer had to be cultural and

environmental, because in the early modern world the idea of biological racism (or ‘scientific racism’) did not truly exist yet. It was not that Africans, Europeans and Native Americans, for instance, were thought to belong to different biological groups. Native Americans were often described as ‘savages’ instead; that is to say, as humans who had not yet been civilised.

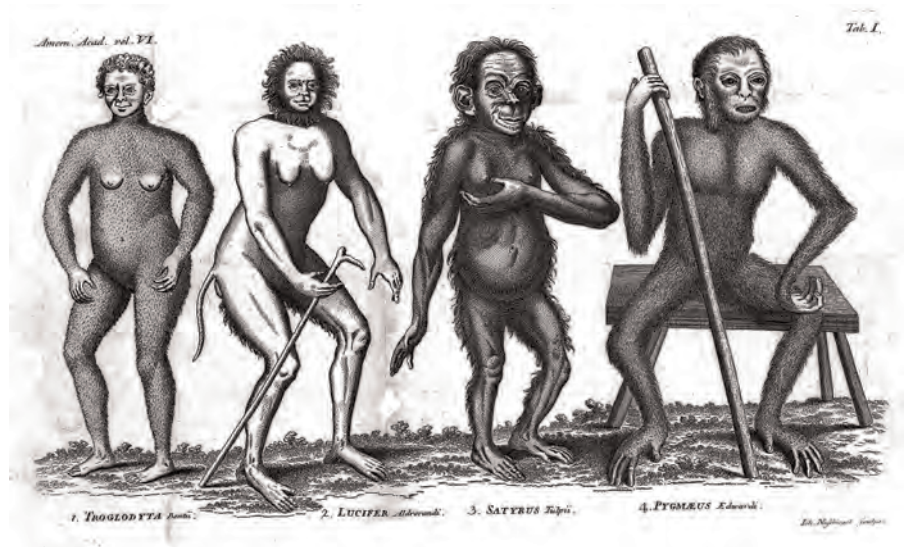


Figure 23.7 Unknown artist, ‘Types of “primitive” man’, as imagined by seventeenth-century anthropologists: 1. Troglodyta Bontii; 2. Lucifer Aldrovandi; 3. Satyrus Tulipii; 4. Pygmaeus Edwardi, engraving, in Carl Linnaeus, *Anthropomorphia*, 1789, Erlangen, J. J. Palm. Wellcome Library, London. Copyrighted work available under Creative Commons Attribution only licence CC BY 4.0 <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.

Figure 23.7 illustrates a different perspective on the Enlightenment debate about racial differences. Theories of biological racism did not yet exist, but their foundations were being laid by eighteenth-century scientists. The Swede Carl Linnaeus (1707–1778) was a botanist and zoologist who pioneered the study of the human species as part of the biological world. He believed that animal races were fixed and permanent, with no idea of change or evolution. He invented a classification system for all known plants and animals, using precise descriptions of their appearance and reproduction, which still forms the basis of modern biological taxonomy. He included humans in his classification and presented several varieties of the human race, including the species he named *Homo sapiens*. This offered a scientific

basis for the racist theories that developed after the Enlightenment and became prominent in the nineteenth century.

As you may have already gathered, the Enlightenment's colonial and racial message was somewhat mixed. On the one hand, since the second half of the twentieth century Enlightenment writers have been heavily criticised for their perceived **eurocentrism**. The way they understood progress, it has been argued by post-colonial scholars such as Edward Said, implied that there was only one single path towards improvement, and this was the path followed by European countries. According to Said, this reasoning provided a justification for European colonialism: since non-European cultures were less advanced on the path of progress, they needed the help of Europeans to move forward and improve (Said, 1978).

However, many Enlightenment thinkers did criticise slavery and colonialism, including Montesquieu, Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) and Diderot (Muthu, 2003).

Exercise 23.3

Turn to Reading 23.1, Louis de Jaucourt, 'Slave trade' (1765), located at the end of the chapter. This is an article from the *Encyclopédie*; its author, Jaucourt (1704–1779), was one of the encyclopaedia's most prolific contributors.

Using what you have learned about Enlightenment ideas of natural rights and progress, explain the distinction Jaucourt is making between 'national laws' (or 'civil laws') and the 'laws of humanity' (or 'Law of Nature').

This should take around 30 minutes.

Discussion

Jaucourt starts by presenting what he holds to be a universal truth: slavery is 'illicit', according to him, because it 'obviously' goes against the 'laws of humanity and equity'. This is the Enlightenment version of what we know today as the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights (which is indeed inspired by Enlightenment ideals): no matter what the particular laws of each country say, there is supposedly a 'universal' law with more authority, which guarantees the same basic rights for all human beings. Today most people would likely agree with Jaucourt that there are indeed universal human rights that should be

respected everywhere, but this idea did not exist before the Enlightenment.

Universal rights? Enlightenment and gender

Reading this chapter, it may seem that the Enlightenment was a very male-dominated movement. This is true to some extent: the most famous Enlightenment thinkers were men, and they wrote for a largely male audience. Moreover, their universalist ideas about liberty, equality and the powers of human reason were rarely applied to women. For instance, Rousseau believed that men and women were naturally different, and therefore he argued in *Emile* that they should also be educated differently. Specifically, he wrote that the minds of men were better suited for independent and abstract thought, which also suited them better for political activities. The minds of women, conversely, were supposedly more sensitive and practical, and his education programme aimed to prepare them for their future roles as wives and mothers. This is certainly a sexist position by modern standards; however, Rousseau did not believe that women were inherently inferior to men, except perhaps physically. In his view, each simply had different intellectual and emotional qualities to offer, and they needed different educations to fully develop these specific qualities and prepare them for their future roles in society.

Ideas such as Rousseau's were given added weight by anatomical scientists who, much like Linnaeus in the case of race, sought to understand scientifically the differences between the sexes. While previous anatomical treatises did not distinguish between male and female skeletons (presenting the male as the 'ideal' human skeleton), illustrations such as those in Figures 23.8 and 23.9 displayed (incorrect) assessments of the anatomical specificities of women: here the female skeleton's skull is too small and the pelvis too large, reinforcing the idea that women's place is in the domestic sphere of family.

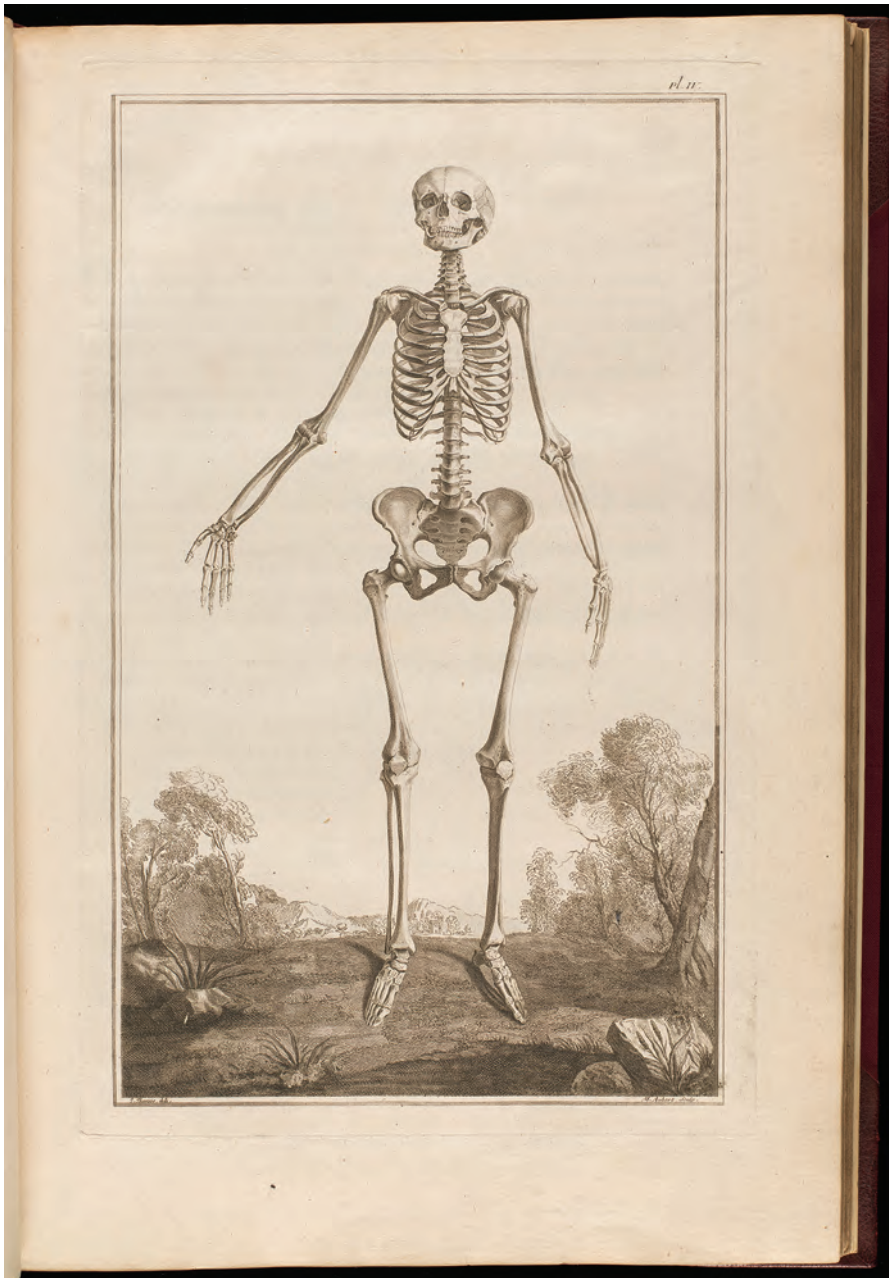


Figure 23.8 Marie-Geneviève-Charlotte Thiroux d'Arconville, 'Female skeleton', engraving from Alexander Monro (trans. Jean-Joseph Sue) *Traité d'ostéologie*, 1759, Paris, G. Cavelier. Wellcome Library, London. Copyrighted work available under Creative Commons Attribution only licence CC BY 4.0 <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.



Figure 23.9 Marie-Geneviève-Charlotte Thiroux d'Arconville, 'Male skeleton', engraving from Alexander Monro (trans. Jean-Joseph Sue) *Traité d'ostéologie*, 1759, Paris, G. Cavelier. Wellcome Library, London. Copyrighted work available under Creative Commons Attribution only licence CC BY 4.0 <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.

However, in recent years historians have shown that women were in fact active participants in the Enlightenment. I have already mentioned the salons: these were traditionally hosted by women, who organised the discussions, networked to promote the careers of their favourite authors, and often presented their own works to the participants.

The painting reproduced as Figure 23.10 is an imaginary rendition of an evening at the home of the famous *salonnière* Marie-Thérèse Rodet Geoffrin (1699–1777). Here a new play by Voltaire is being read to the audience. Mme Geoffrin was particularly keen to invite literary celebrities, and in this imaginary scene all the famous writers who frequented her salon are gathered, including Montesquieu and Diderot. Voltaire himself is not present in the painting (in 1755 he was living in exile), but you can see his bust in the background, dominating the scene. Mme Geoffrin is sitting in the front row, to the right. She is seated not far from her protégée Julie de Lespinasse (1732–1776) – to her left, in the yellow dress – who went on to host one of the most successful salons in eighteenth-century Paris.



Figure 23.10 Anicet-Charles Lemonnier, *The First Reading at Mme Geoffrin's of Voltaire's Tragedy 'L'Orphelin de la Chine'*, 1755, oil on canvas, 130 x 196 cm. Musée National du Château de Malmaison, Rueil-Malmaison, France. Photo: © Musée National du Château de Malmaison / Bridgeman Images.

But being a salon hostess was not the only way for women to be involved in the Enlightenment. In Britain some coffee houses were run by women, although this was rare (Berry, 2001), and some debating societies welcomed the participation of women. These societies organised discussions in rented public spaces, focusing on a wide range of topics, often including the role of women in society. As women became more frequent participants, a number of female debating societies were also started (Andrews, 1996).

Finally, not all Enlightenment thinkers believed (as Rousseau did) that the minds of women were naturally different from those of men.

Exercise 23.4

Turn to Reading 23.2, Daniel Defoe, 'The education of women' (1719), located at the end of the chapter. It was written relatively early in the Enlightenment, when the education of women was not yet a serious topic of debate.

- What were Defoe's arguments in favour of the education of women?

This should take around 15 minutes.

Discussion

Defoe (c.1660–1731) was one of the earliest advocates of female education, which is why the text combines traditional views of women and society with newer and more subversive ideas. Defoe was defending a new and radical idea (that women should be educated), but he did so by relying on conservative arguments. First, he equated God and Christianity with civilisation and education. Because God gave all humans (including women) rational minds, it was their duty to make the most out of their abilities. Thus Defoe presented the Enlightenment's worship of reason as being in accordance with, rather than opposed to, traditional Christianity. Second, he argued that women should be educated not so much for their own benefit, as for the enjoyment of men: women were 'ornaments', and as such would be worth more to men if they had less 'folly' and more 'wit'.

Therefore this text is something of a transitional moment in the Enlightenment view of women: innovative in its defence of female education, but traditional in founding its argument on Christianity and the subordinate position of women.

Conclusion

In the previous chapters of Book 3 you examined the commercial, political and intellectual developments that characterised early modern Europe. This chapter has shown you that the Enlightenment was both a product of social and economic transformations, and an intellectual attempt to come to grips with Europe's new identity and role in the wider world. It is this intellectual project that primarily explains why some historians associate the Enlightenment with the end of the early modern period and the beginnings of 'modernity'. While the early modern world emphasised religious spirituality and respect for traditional structures of authority, the Enlightenment's celebration of reason, science and tolerance promoted a world view that Europeans still recognise as theirs in the twenty-first century. Yet, when it came to questions of race, gender or democracy, even enlightened thinkers held views that were often still very remote from today's. The Enlightenment's ideals of progress, freedom and equality certainly had their limits – but the job of the historian is to explain and understand the past, not to judge an eighteenth-century movement by twenty-first-century standards.

I hope this chapter has shown you why intellectual movements need to be studied by historians: the Enlightenment was a relatively elite movement, but its cultural influence was immediate and enormous, and still resonates today. You have also learned that its influence on the everyday life of the average European was not immediately as obvious, because Enlightenment ideas remained mostly limited to an educated elite. This is why we should be careful not to overstate the link between Enlightenment and modernity: the bulk of the European population remained very much disconnected from the lofty ideals of urban intellectuals and held on to the traditional ways of thinking and behaviours you studied in the previous chapters.

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Readings

Reading 23.1 Louis de Jaucourt, 'Slave trade'

Source: Jaucourt, L. (2007 [1765]) 'Slave trade' ('Traite des nègres'), vol. 16, *The Encyclopedia of Diderot & d'Alembert Collaborative Translation Project* (trans. S. Noble), Ann Arbor, MI, University of Michigan Library, pp. 532–3.

Men and their freedom are not objects of commerce; they can be neither sold, nor purchased, nor bought at any price. Thus, a man must blame only himself if his slave escapes. He paid money for illicit merchandise, even though all laws of humanity and equity forbid him to do so. ...

It is thus an obvious inhumanity that, in the free country to which the Negro is transported, judges do not immediately decide to liberate him by declaring that he is free, as he is the judges' fellow man and has a soul like theirs.

There are some authors who set themselves up as political legal experts and who boldly say that questions relating to a society's condition must be decided by its national laws. They also argue that when a man is denoted a slave in America, he must remain a slave when he is transported to Europe. However, this results in deciding the rights of humanity by despicable civil laws, as Cicero said. Must not the magistrates of a nation, out of consideration for another nation, have any regard for their own species? Is it their deference to a law, which obliges them to nothing, that forces them to trample on the Law of Nature, which obligates all men in all times and places? Is there any law that is as necessary as the external laws of equity? Can one raise the question of whether a judge is more obligated to observe them, than to respect the arbitrary and inhumane customs of colonies?

[p. 533]

Reading 23.2 Daniel Defoe, 'The education of women'

Source: Defoe, D. (1910 [1719]) 'The education of women', in Eliot, C. W. (ed.) *English Essays: From Sir Philip Sidney to Macaulay*, vol. 27, New York, P. F. Collier & Son Corporation, pp. 148–9.

I have often thought of it as one of the most barbarous customs in the world, considering us as a civilized and a Christian country, that we deny the advantages of learning to women. We reproach the sex every day with folly and impertinence; while I am confident, had they the advantages of education equal to us, they would be guilty of less than ourselves.

...

The soul is placed in the body like a rough diamond; and must be polished, or the lustre of it will never appear. And 'tis manifest, that as the rational soul distinguishes us from brutes; so education carries on the distinction, and makes some less brutish than others. This is too evident to need any demonstration. But why then should women be denied the benefit of instruction? If knowledge and understanding had been useless additions to the sex, GOD Almighty would never have given them capacities; for he made nothing needless. Besides, I would ask such, What they can see in ignorance, that they should think it a necessary ornament to a woman? or how much worse is a wise woman than a fool? or what has the woman done to forfeit the privilege of being taught? Does she plague us with her pride and impertinence? Why did we not let her learn, that she might have had more wit? Shall we upbraid women with folly, when 'tis only the error of this inhuman custom, that hindered them from being made wiser?

[p. 149]

Glossary

absolutism

rule by a head of state, usually a monarch, who believed s/he had a divine right to rule absolutely and alone and held sovereignty over the people in every aspect of government and the law.

Age of Discovery

the European exploration of the globe, starting in the fifteenth century and lasting until the ‘discovery’ of Australia and the South Pacific in the seventeenth century, and the mapping of Polynesia and the North Pacific in the eighteenth century.

bonds

fixed interest shares or loans to the government.

Catholic League

the Catholic League of France, sometimes referred to by contemporary (and modern) Catholics as the Holy League, was a major participant in the French Wars of Religion. Formed by Henry I, Duke of Guise, in 1576, the League intended the eradication of Protestants.

classicism

the principles of ancient Greek and Roman art, literature and politics. These were seen as harmonious, orderly and following the rules of reason, and were therefore often celebrated by the Enlightenment.

direct democracy

a type of democracy in which citizens do not elect representatives, but rather take part themselves in the legislative process.

Dissenters

those who dissent from the established state church, such as non-conforming Protestants, Baptists and Unitarians, who dissented from the Anglican Church in England.

division of labour

the splitting of a production process into a number of separate tasks, each of which is performed by a different individual.

empiricist

the theory that human knowledge derives primarily from the experience of human senses.

eurocentrism

a way of understanding the world that centres on Europe, and assumes that its culture and history are most important.

grant of probate

the legal document that must be obtained before a deceased person's estate can be distributed to the beneficiaries.

Host

the sacramental bread or wafer (*Hostia* in Latin).

Levant

a historical geographical term that identified an area of the eastern Mediterranean, today part of the Middle East.

national debts

borrowing by governments to supplement income.

Ottoman Empire

an empire founded in Turkey at the end of the thirteenth century, based on Islam, that grew and covered the Middle East and much of South-East Europe at its peak and lasted until the early twentieth century.

parlements

provincial appellate courts in the France of the Ancien Régime, i.e. before the French Revolution. In 1789, 13 parlements existed, the most important of which was, by far, the Parlement of Paris.

republic

a state in which supreme authority is not held by a monarch.

secondary market

sales of stocks and shares between holders of the stocks and shares rather than issued by the company or corporate body itself.

stock-jobbers

dealers in stocks, shares and bonds, able to deal on their own account as well as for clients.

sumptuary legislation

various laws across Europe governing what people could consume. For example in England during the sixteenth century people had to dress according to their rank with only the elite allowed to wear certain luxury fabrics and elaborate designs. This was a way of asserting high rank and social superiority. Most such laws were repealed in England in the seventeenth century.

toleration

in religious terms, a situation in which more than one religion may be followed.

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Reading 22.2 Francis Bacon and the reformation of astrology:
Rutkin, H. D. (2006), 'Astrology' in Park, K. and Daston, L. (eds),
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